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A Christmas Story from Aloïse Buckley Heath

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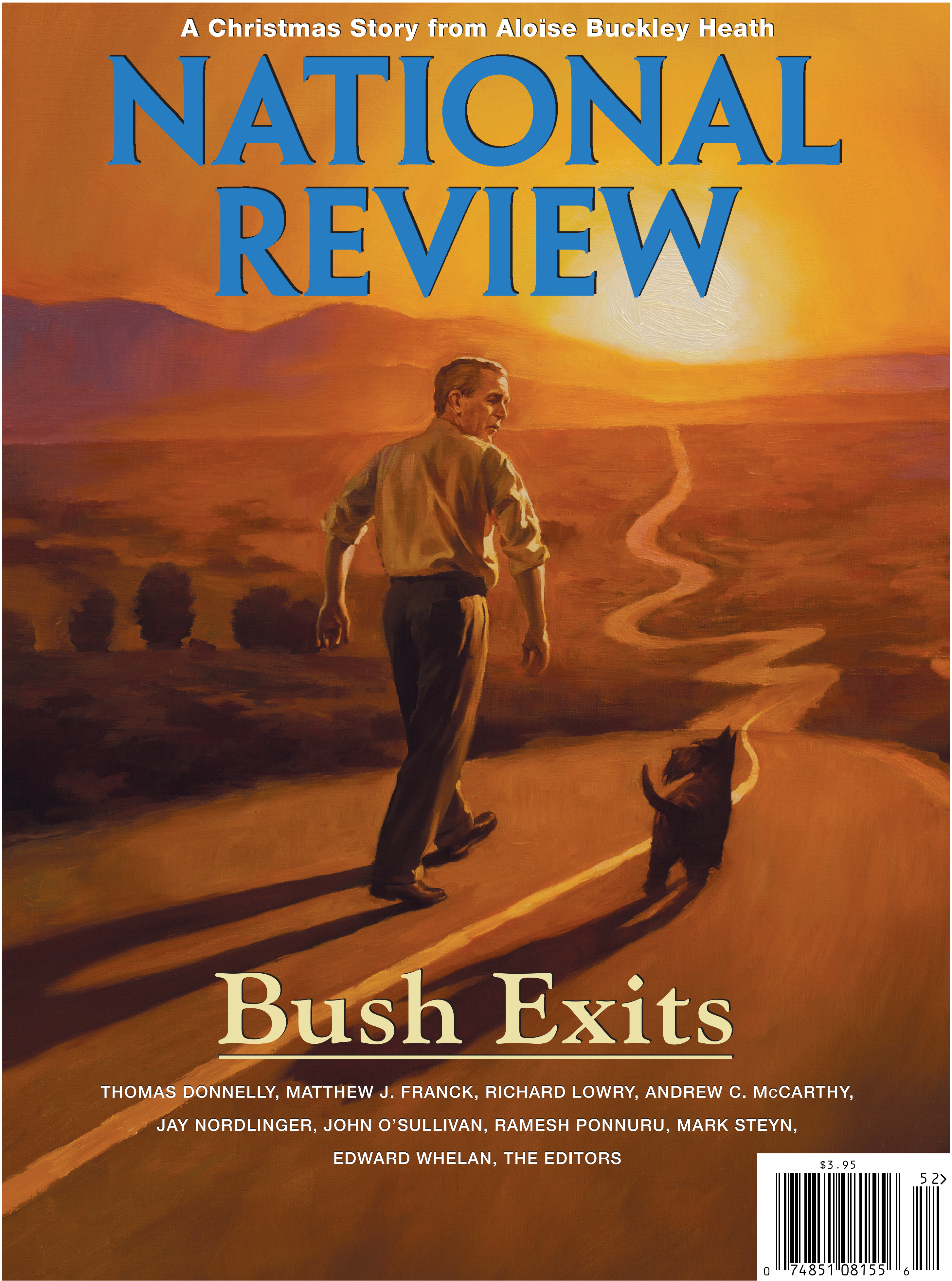

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DECEMBER 29, 2008 VOL. LX, NO. 24

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■ ON THE COVER

Vision, Honor, Action

For good or ill, George W. Bush was the real Third Way deal Bill Clinton merely genuflected towards. Yet Bush also is who he is, and he never pretended to be anything but. Do you know how rare that is? *By Mark Steyn*

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letters to the editor

IT'S THE ECONOMY, STEYN

Mark Steyn: As you so sadly write about the "deal of ruin in a nation," and conclude that Americans elected Barack Obama because they reject their country's founding values ("Dimpled Ruin," December 1), I must reject your thesis on the grounds of one simple factor that came hurling to the forefront of the election: the economy. This is still the ardently individualist, self-willed, limited-government, gun-slinging country our forefathers helped create over 200 years ago. The problem was that the GOP candidate was from the same party as the presiding president (or at least appeared to be).

Jake Christensen
Via e-mail

THE DOOM OF STATISM

Mark Steyn ("Dimpled Ruin") may "hate to be the Gloomy Gus," but his "incremental decay" reminds this anxious conservative of an earlier gloomy and not very happy warrior. A half century ago, Whittaker Chambers, spookily prescient, alluded to his fears about the power of collective, redistributive statism to destroy the fabric of free nations.

In *Witness*, Chambers, describing his epiphany, stated that "something in me more lucid than mind knew that I had reached the end of an experience, which was not only my experience. Out of that vision of Almighty Man that we call Communism and that agony of souls and bodies that we call the revolution of the 20th century was left that pinch of irreducible dust: 'Who pays is boss and who takes money must also give something.' It might stand as the motto for every welfare philosophy."

Presumably, Chambers would have agreed with Steyn that King Obama's reign will require any who take the money to give up the liberty that has long been precious to anxious conservatives. Chambers is gone, so, Mr. Steyn, please keep warring and witnessing.

Gerald K. Masters
Newark, N.Y.

LATIN LOVERS ANONYMOUS

The late William F. Buckley Jr., who loved Latin so much, would have headed Ross Douthat's clever article on Gov. Sarah Palin (December 1) "Sarah Resarta" (adjective feminine), not "Sarah Resartus" (adjective masculine), in accordance with Latin grammar. Or, being the purist he was, he might have used the gerundive instead, titling it "Sarah Resarcienda," which better translates the subtitle "Tailoring Sarah for the future."

On the other hand, many readers would have missed the pun on Thomas Carlyle's treatise on clothing (*Sartor Resartus*), and on Sarah Palin's sartorial spree.

José A. Ramirez
Via e-mail

THE EDITORS REPLY: We had that conversation, though we made the decision *celerius quam asparagi cocuntur.* Bearing in mind that Virgil was a *poeta* and not a *poetus*, we chose to use the masculine form for the feminine governor, so as to avoid inducing our readers to Google "resarta" and miss the Carlyle reference. Though "Sarah Resarta" does have a pleasing assonance, the governor of Alaska, with her gun-toting, moose-slaying, and caribou-butchering, hardly demands a daintily feminized inflection in deference to her sex, and we're confident that she will not be mistaken for a man in spite of the masculine *resartus*. Sometimes an editor must break the rules: *Non ducor, duco.*

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THE WEEK

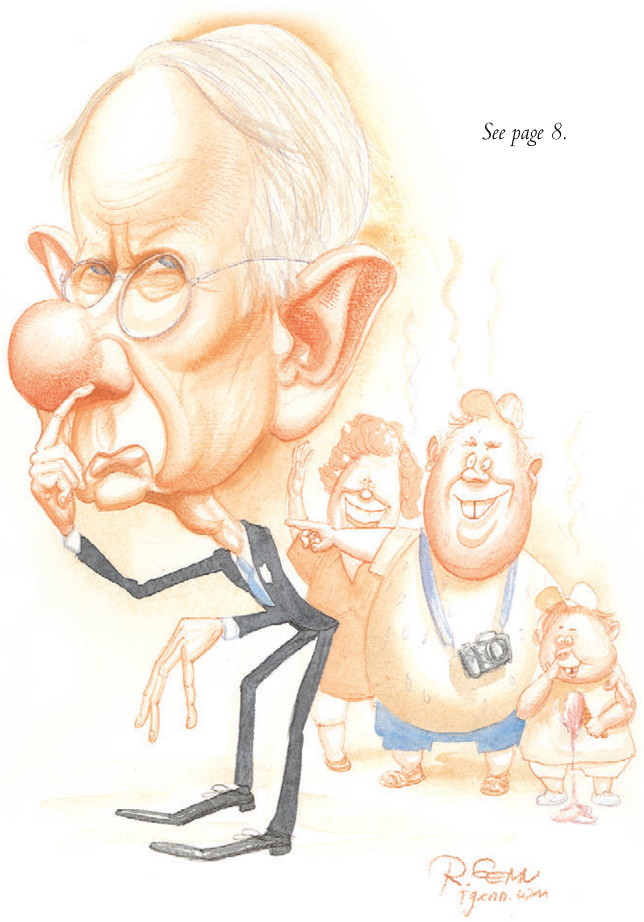
■ Deflation: Hillary Clinton paid $36 million for her Senate seat, but Obama's was on the market for a mere $150,000.

■ The presumption of innocence is a fine principle for the criminal-justice system to follow, but it need not keep *us* from reaching the obvious conclusion that Rod Blagojevich, the Democratic governor of Illinois, is a crook. In a spectacular indictment, he is accused of, among other things, trying to sell a U.S. Senate seat—the one being vacated by Obama—for personal gain. The corruption of Illinois politics these days must impress even Louisianans: Blagojevich's Republican predecessor is in jail.

■ Charlie Rangel just can't stay out of the news. It emerges that the New York Democrat paid nearly $60,000 in campaign funds to a web-design firm run by his son. Congress writes the laws for Congress, so members are permitted to pay relatives, at least if transactions reflect fair market value. Rangel, though, pays more for Internet services than any other lawmaker. Meanwhile, a House ethics investigation continues over Rangel's occupancy of several coveted New York City rent-controlled apartments, his alleged delinquencies on property taxes, and the raising of $11 million for, yes, a "public service" school City College plans to name after him—with scrutiny drawn to the use of congressional letterhead for solicitations and the congressman's preserving of a lucrative tax loophole for an oil company that promised to kick in $1 million. But Rangel remains upbeat that his chairmanship of the powerful Ways & Means Committee is not in jeopardy. As Speaker Nancy Pelosi might say, it's not easy "to lead the most honest, most open, and most ethical Congress in history."

■ On December 2, Republican senator Saxby Chambliss of Georgia trounced his Democratic challenger in a special election, 57 percent to 43 percent. In the near term, the victory vaporizes Democratic dreams of a filibuster-proof majority. For the long term, it suggests that the Democratic turnout seen on November 4 does not materialize when Obama is not personally fueling it. President Bush won Georgia by 17 points in 2004, but this year John McCain carried the state by only 5 points. Chambliss fared even worse. He nipped Democrat Jim Martin by just 3 points and failed to secure a majority, which forced both men into a runoff. Sarah Palin showed up to rally the base, which helped put Chambliss over the top by his comfortable margin. If Republicans are fortunate, the result isn't merely a faint silver lining at the end of a cloudy election cycle, but a foreshadowing of success to come in 2010.

ROMAN GENN



See page 8.

■ Republicans aren't supposed to win in Louisiana's 2nd congressional district, where nearly two-thirds of the residents are black. But on December 6, Anh "Joseph" Cao defeated Democratic incumbent William Jefferson. Cao's victory owes much to scandal: Last year, Jefferson was indicted on 16 counts of bribery after the FBI found $90,000 stuffed in his freezer. It's hard to win reelection under such a cloud, though Jefferson still managed to carry 47 percent of the vote. The soft-spoken and erudite Cao will become the first Vietnamese American to join Congress—he arrived in the United States as an eight-year-old refugee in 1975. His victory shows that Republicans are wise to put up viable and compelling candidates even in apparently hopeless districts. Just as Democrats benefited from the ethical implosion of Sen. Ted Stevens in Republican-heavy Alaska, the GOP can make unexpected gains when it takes long odds seriously rather than writes them off.

■ Jeb Bush does not hunger for Washington, which is one reason we want him there. Sen. Mel Martinez has announced

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that he will not seek reelection, and Bush, who might have been a 2008 presidential candidate if his name were Jeb Jones, is best positioned to carry the conservative banner. He has one of the most enviable records of any Republican governor: Florida already had no income tax, but Bush found many other taxes to cut. Washington Republicans talked a good fight about smaller government, but Bush cut 11,000 jobs from the government workforce in Florida. His education reforms helped boost test scores, particularly for minority students, and he advocated school choice. He managed to privatize dozens of state services, including Medicaid collections, saving Florida's taxpayers billions of dollars. Bush's easy appeal, solid conservatism, and abundant energy give him the potential to join the ranks of Phil Gramm and Barry Goldwater—conservative stalwarts who helped rejuvenate both the Right and the party that remains its principal instrument. There's a "Help Wanted" sign on the door of the Republican leadership; Jeb Bush should knock.

■ Some of the same people who believed the governor of Alaska to be grossly unqualified to serve as vice president of the United States are settling on a candidate for the U.S. Senate: the honorary chairman of the American Ballet Theatre. The Manhattan socialite in question probably wouldn't

Agent Provocateur

David Brooks is one of my favorite people in Washington. It is something of a cliché to preface all criticism of Brooks with a declaration of this sort, but that doesn't make it any less true. My admiration for Brooks extends so far that I am willing to overlook the possibility that he is, in fact, a French sleeper agent.

Let us review some of the evidence. In his path-breaking book *Bobos in Paradise* (2000), he described a wonderful transformation in which Americans had turned a blind eye to longstanding cultural disputes and embraced a fairly secular, apolitical ethos that emphasized aesthetics, design, and food as the lodestars of a fulfilled life. Tellingly, Brooks—who has spent time in France's Mini-Me, Belgium—invoked two thoroughly French concepts to describe these people: "Bourgeois Bohemians."

These Gallicized Americans congregated in liberal enclaves like Burlington, Vt. Alas, Brooks discovered them during a docile period, the fin-de-siècle of the Clinton years, and he mistook their obsessions with runny cheese and distressed furniture for post-partisanship. As soon as George W. Bush took the oath of office, never mind invaded Iraq, the Burlingtonites and Parisians alike became inflamed with ideological hatred.

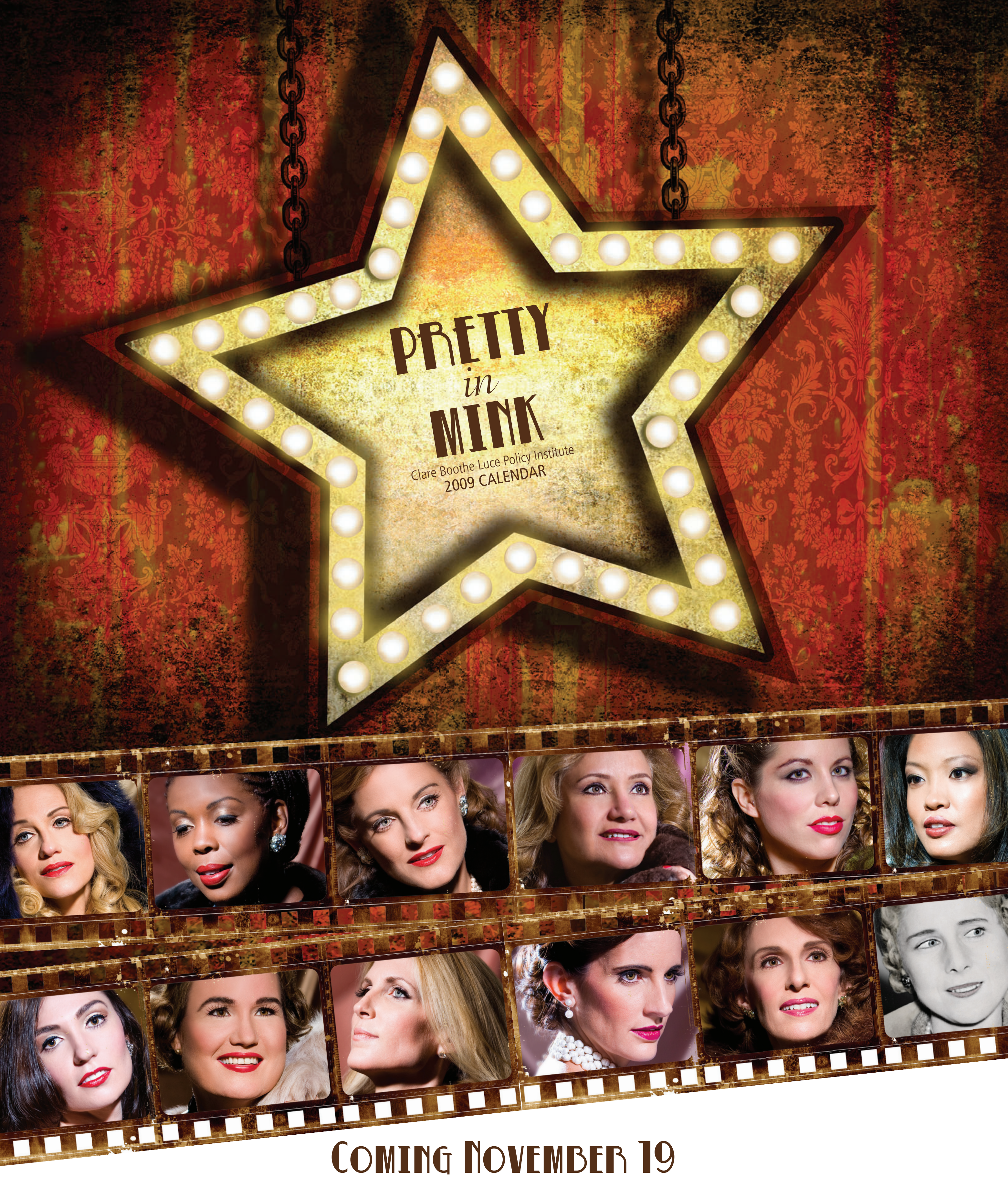
Earlier in the 1990s, Brooks had become the leading scribe for an intellectual campaign at *The Weekly Standard* that he dubbed "National Greatness." Much of this stuff was well argued and brilliantly written, but classically froggy in its outlook. It looked to restore a past era of greatness when—it was imagined—all eyes were on America's civilizational happening. Very pretty buildings and nifty inventions used to pop up all over the place during our glory days, he said, but not so much anymore. The danger for Americans in 1997, Brooks wrote (during a period of remarkable innovation, one might add), was that "if they think of nothing but their narrow self-interest, of their commercial activities, they lose a sense of grand aspiration and noble purpose." Imagine how much more persuasive that must have been in the original French.

Now consider the latest evidence. In a recent column in the *New York Times*, Brooks argued that Barack Obama's coming tsunami of public-works spending should be targeted at locking in the latest trends in middle-class living: "the new localism." In exurbs around the country, people want more cafés, farmers' markets, concert halls, and meeting places. Rather than spend money on refurbishing and expanding the existing interstate highway system, Brooks wrote, the government should underwrite a grand cultural strategy whereby we augment this trend by funding new town squares where we can read *Le Monde* over cups of café au lait. Or something.

My point here isn't to ridicule the idea. Brooks is right that if we're going to have a "once-in-a-half-century infrastructure investment," we might indeed want to put some thought into it instead of reflexively refilling the same old public-sector troughs and slush buckets. But first, it's worth noting that there is something deeply . . . *Continental* about this approach to public policy. The French are connoisseurs of using the state as an engine of cultural policymaking. In America, the idea of using government to guide and form culture is still deeply—and, with hope, enduringly—controversial.

Second, Brooks is a gifted trend spotter—and setter—but spotting trends and locking them into national policy planning is the sort of thing that makes the ghost of Friedrich Hayek cry. The French, too, are wonderful at trend spotting. Does anyone remember their effort in the 1980s to put an "informatique" in every home? These networked computer terminals were a sensation—you could find out when the Jerry Lewis Marathon began from your own home!—and the wave of the future. Now hundreds of thousands of them collect dust in funky antiques shops. Maybe America can beat the French at their own game, but I'd rather we didn't try to play it.

—JONAH GOLDBERG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even have that sinecure if not for her surname and fortune, but Caroline Kennedy is emerging as a possibility to replace Sen. Hillary Clinton, who is expected to become secretary of state. Kennedy's career as a gala ornament and check-magnet is the usual stuff of shiftless American aristocrats, and it would be a stretch to describe many of the items on her curriculum vitae as full-time jobs. She does not work, she presides. And she lends her name to a bland bouquet of liberal designs. It would be foolish to give her a Senate seat in tribute to her father.

■ Obama's economic team has received too much praise from Republicans, including Karl Rove. Lawrence Summers, Peter Orszag, and Christina Romer are getting credit for not being protectionists, even though almost no economists are. Romer has had a kind word for tax cuts in the past. But Summers is a thoroughgoing redistributionist. Orszag has floated a plan to make Social Security solvent that relies almost entirely on tax increases while lending academic support to demagoguery about "benefit cuts." Timothy Geithner's cooperation with Henry Paulson in Wall Street bailouts, meanwhile, hardly qualifies him as a free-market champion. Republicans who offer this crew extravagant praise are doing their small part to move the center of gravity of the economic debate leftward.

■ One of the unseemly features of the 2008 election and its aftermath is the persistent conspiracy theory that Obama was not born in the United States. The Supreme Court in December rightly declined to hear a meritless complaint on the issue. There are many reasons to have opposed Obama, and there will be many reasons to oppose him in the future, but the State of Hawaii has amply documented that Obama was born there. Conservatives do themselves no favors by inhaling these vapors from the fever swamps.

■ At press time, Congress and the president appeared close to a deal to bail out the Detroit automakers. The compromise calls for the appointment of a federal "car czar" to direct a restructuring of the Big Three and $15 billion to effectuate the task. The seeds of failure are sown into the deal: One provision bars the car companies from seeking injunctions against states that set tighter emissions standards than the feds. California has just adopted such a standard, which the Big Three cannot comply with while turning a profit. Without legal recourse, their most profitable cars and trucks will be shut out of the nation's largest market. This is Nancy Pelosi's idea of sustainability? If, as seems likely, the restructuring does not work, consider the $15 billion a down payment, for it is the nature of federal czars to attribute mission failure to inadequate resources, as it is the nature of Congress to throw good money after bad.

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NICK UT/AP

■ Like a bunch of irresponsible college kids who have burned through their cash and maxed out their credit cards on a Spring Break bender, some of America's governors, led by Arnold Schwarzenegger, are crying "uncle"—Uncle Sam. The states that have spent too much want billions of dollars from taxpayers in the states that have not. They shouldn't get it, and Schwarzenegger provides the case study: Since taking over from Gray Davis, no fiscal conservative, Schwarzenegger, abetted by the Democrats in the legislature, has steered the state into a 40 percent increase in spending, some $41 billion a year. If only California could return to the Gray Davis standard of responsibility (!) the state would be in the black. The spendthrift states must get their houses in order, and that is going to mean spending restraint. If cuts prove insufficient and some states are forced to restructure their debt, the markets will penalize them in appropriate fashion by making it more expensive for them to borrow money in the future. This will be a good thing, in the state legislatures as on Wall Street.

■ Michelle Malkin joked that after the money-lenders and jalopy-makers, ailing U.S. newspapers would come around asking for a government handout. Michelle shouldn't tell jokes: Connecticut politicians are considering support for several ailing newspapers, the *Herald* (of New Britain) and the *Bristol Press* among them. There are many reasons to oppose such an action. One is that these newspapers are operated by the Journal Register Co., arguably America's least competent newspaper publisher, a firm in such disarray that its stock has gone from $25 a share to a penny. The people of Connecticut would be better off with their local newspapers run by hotdog vendors, who often have some business sense. The more pressing consideration is that it is impossible to have a free press bankrolled by the government: A press that is not financially independent is not editorially independent.

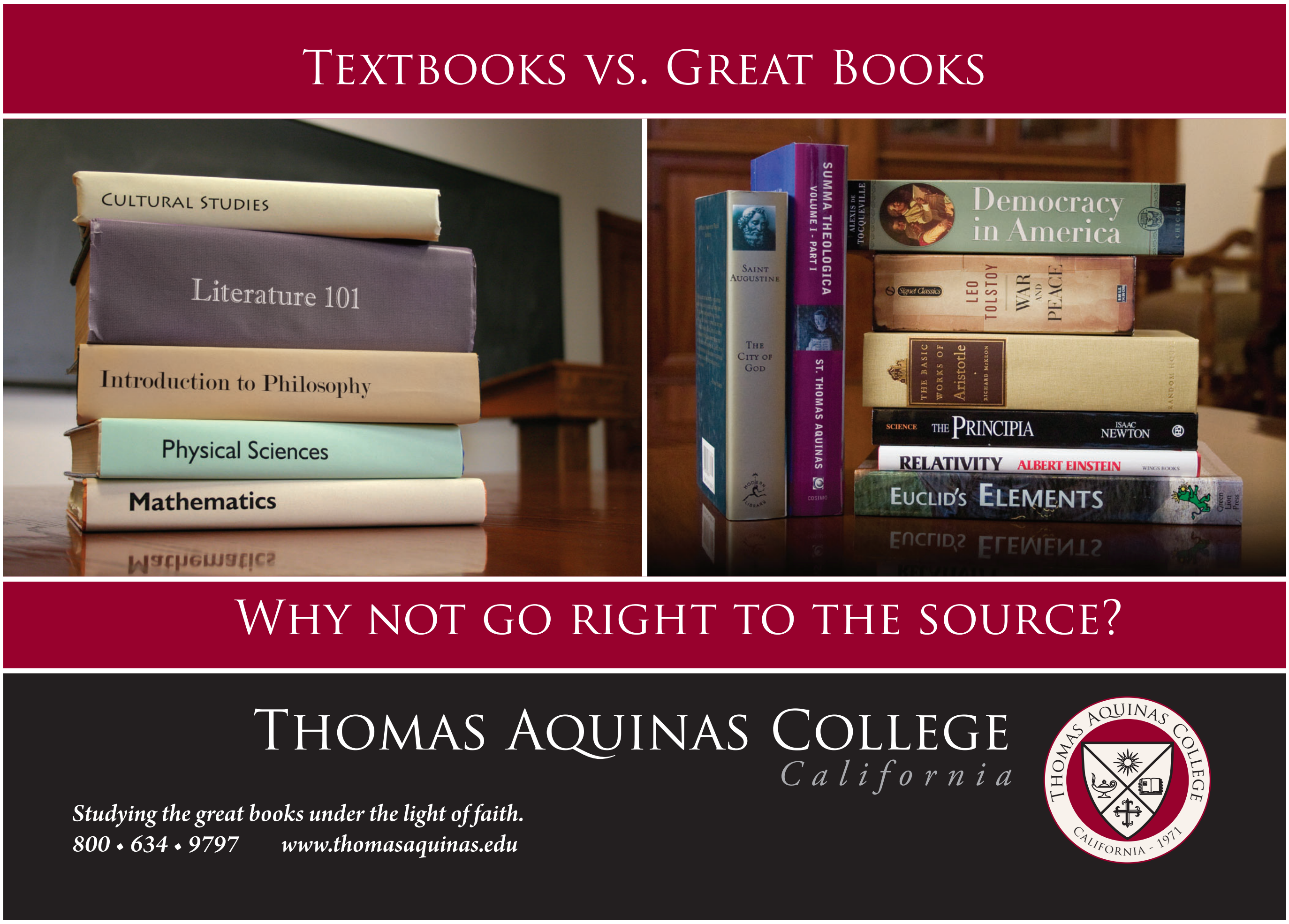
■ The contempt of our political classes for us, the Great Unwashed, is for the most part kept decently well hidden. Once in a while the veil slips, though. It did so recently when Senate majority leader Harry Reid said the following at the opening of the new, air-conditioned, $621 million Capitol Visitor Center: "My staff tells me not to say this, but I'm going to say it anyway. In the summer because of the heat and high humidity, you could literally smell the tourists coming into the Capitol. It may be descriptive but it's true." Pity our poor legislators, obliged to put up with the noise and stink of—ugh!—*citizens* traipsing through their palace. What of the overlords themselves, though? Rumors from the congressional press pool suggest that the injunction "Physician, heal thyself" would not always be out of context here.

■ Gavin Newsom, the mayor of San Francisco, has put his state-of-the-city speech on YouTube—all seven and a half hours of it. Does he realize that the position of Cuban dictator has been filled—and that he's not related to Fidel Castro anyway? Also, what is it about left-wing redoubts and marathon speeches by the Leader? As for us, we'll take the Gettysburg Address.

ZUMA

■ In 48 states, it is illegal for doctors to try to kill their patients even at the patients' request. The prohibition stays on the books for many reasons: tradition, fear of a slippery slope, belief that the right to life is inalienable. Now a Montana judge wants to reduce that number to 47, casting all of those reasons aside and declaring a right to assisted suicide that the legislature cannot infringe. Without having made a detailed study of the matter, we venture the guess that nobody who ratified Montana's constitution or its amendments intended to grant the state's judges the authority to enact a moral revolution. The state should appeal, and wiser judges should overturn the ruling.

■ Five top Qaeda terrorists—including Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the network's operational commander and choreographer of the 9/11 atrocities—surprised the judge in their military-commission trial with a joint demand to admit guilt and move straight to the death penalty, their coveted martyrdom. For once, their interests and America's are aligned. Upon certifying the competency of two of the combatants, the court should accept their guilty pleas and move swiftly to the capital phase: It is necessary because, however devoutly the terrorists wish for execution, that matter is not up to them. But there is no reason to delay the finding of guilt: The commission trials are proceeding based on an act of Congress that ensures review, by a federal appellate court, of any claimed errors. Going ahead promptly with this one would serve our national-security interests without tying the Obama administration's hands regarding any other combatants or the future of the Guantanamo Bay detention center.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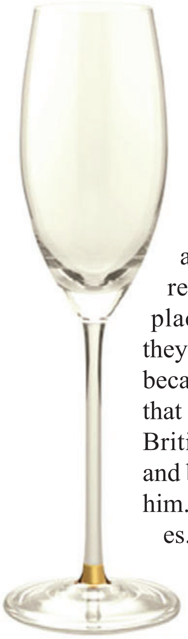
THE WEEK...

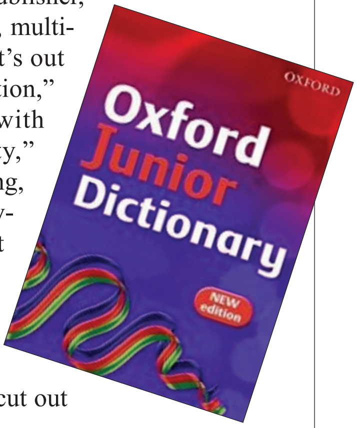
■ Shirwa Ahmed was a jihadist: a suicide terrorist who killed 29 people in a bombing in northern Somalia in October. He was also a naturalized American citizen, part of a tide of Somali immigration to Minnesota. In just the last few years, as the Somali enclave has grown by tens of thousands, Minnesotans have borne witness to Muslim taxi drivers' refusing to ferry airport passengers they suspected of carrying alcohol, as well as Muslim high-school pupils' threatening a seizure-prone student because they were offended by his specially trained dog. In Ahmed's case, the FBI bizarrely reacted by coming to the family's aid—retrieving the terrorist's remains from Somali authorities so he could be buried at "home" in Minnesota. Presumably, the Bureau was motivated by the hope of gaining cooperation and intelligence: There are reports of young Muslim men missing, and Ahmed appears to have been a recruiter, urging fellow Muslims to return to Somalia to join jihadist groups there. But at some point, shouldn't outreach and indulgence have their limits?



■ "This is very good port they have given me," remarked William Ewart Gladstone, visiting the home of the young Bertrand Russell, "but why have they given it me in a claret glass?" These high civilizational standards are still maintained at Bombay's Taj Mahal hotel. During the recent terrorist attack on the hotel, a group of 40 guests and staff barricaded themselves in one of the restaurants for several hours. Their hiding place encompassed a well-stocked bar, but they made a collective decision not to touch it because of the need to stay alert. Hearing at last that troops had taken the hotel lobby, one of the British guests opened a bottle of champagne and began pouring it. A horrified waiter stopped him. "No, sir, those are the wrong type of glasses. I shall find you champagne flutes." He did so, registering a tiny but memorable victory in the never-ending war between order and chaos.

■ Nicolas Sarkozy, president of France, met with the Dalai Lama in Gdansk, Poland. They were in that city to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Lech Walesa's Nobel Peace Prize. China did not want the meeting to happen, of course. In the days leading up to the meeting, it put heavy pressure on France and canceled a China-EU summit. When the meeting took place, the Chinese government said that Sarkozy had "grossly interfered in China's internal affairs." Moreover, his meeting with the Tibetan spiritual leader had "severely undermined China's core interest, gravely hurt the feelings of the Chinese people, and sabotaged the political basis of China-France and China-EU relations." For good measure, the PRC called the Tibetan a "political hooligan." The Chinese government has a funny way of demanding the world's respect.

■ Out with the old, in with the new. Oxford University Press publishes a "junior dictionary," widely used in British schools and popular with parents. More than 150 obsolete or offensive words have been dropped from the most recent edition, and a corresponding number of improving words brought in, to reflect, says the publisher, the fact that Britain is a modern, multicultural, multifaith society. So it's out with "altar," "bishop," "coronation," "disciple," and "empire"; in with "apparatus," "blog," "celebrity," "database," and "Euro." How long, we wonder, before British encyclopedias follow the old Soviet example, mailing out packets of replacement pages to subscribers when some historical or political article becomes "incorrect," with instructions to cut out and destroy the superseded text?



■ The Catholic bishops of England and Wales have called for Islamic prayer rooms to be provided in their parochial schools, 30 percent of whose students are non-Catholic. The bishops don't stop there. Devout Muslims purify themselves before prayer through a ritual called Wudhu. This involves washing the face, hands, arms, and feet three times each, gargling the mouth three times, and washing the neck and inside the nose and ears. Some Muslims also wash their private parts. Wudhu must be performed after using the lavatory or breaking wind. Well, the bishops want their schools to offer Wudhu facilities, too: bidets, foot spas, and hoses. Accommodation of Muslims sometimes seems to be the central organizing feature of British public life these days.

■ When Canada's Conservatives won the most seats in October's parliamentary election, their leader, Stephen Harper, retained his post as prime minister. Soon afterward he announced plans to ban strikes by federal employees, end government-imposed "pay equity" for women, and—most outrageous of all—eliminate public subsidies for political parties. The opposition, evidently having followed American politics, was shocked that a conservative party would live up to its principles. Soon a majority was cobbled together from three parties: the center-leftist Liberals, the left-leftist National Democrats, and the poutine-eating surrender monkeys of the Bloc Québecois. (Our Mark Steyn, a recovering Canadian, calls the coalition "a misbegotten pantomime horse composed of three rear ends.") But when the coalition threatened a vote of no confidence, things started getting too exciting for Canada, and the governor general, appointed by Queen Elizabeth, had to suspend the parliament for seven weeks to let everyone calm down. While NATIONAL REVIEW takes a dim view of letting foreign monarchs run a democracy, we have to admit that this

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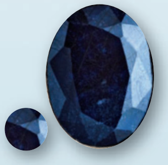
Stauer is thrilled to present the *Midnight Blue 22* carat Sapphire necklace. And don't worry; we didn't let the luxury mavens dictate the price. Most jewelers would charge exorbitantly high prices for 22 carat stones, but Stauer can keep the price at under $150. A gemological rarity with deep ethereal blue tones, the sapphire is the second hardest stone known to mankind, second only to diamonds. The history of sapphire collecting goes back over 2,400 years and sapphires have adorned the finest jewelry from British Royal crowns to Princess Di's engagement ring. But we are willing to guarantee that no one in your circle has a stone anything quite like this. Since every stone is unique, that guarantee is easy to keep. It goes without saying that this is a limited edition, since we are never sure if we can find any more stones of this size and cut.



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THE WEEK...

system has its advantages. Is it too late for America to join the Commonwealth? Warm beer, funny spelling, and even cricket would be a small price to pay for a Congress that can be sent home when it misbehaves.

■ Archaeologists investigating a 2,700-year-old tomb in the Xinjiang-Uighur region of China have identified a substance found in a wooden bowl as *Cannabis sativa*—marijuana. The stash of Uighur weed, meant for use in the afterlife by the deceased, contained 789 grams, which suggests that the deceased was planning to stay in the afterlife for several weeks at least. A research paper concludes that "the *Gushi* culture cultivated cannabis for pharmaceutical, psychoactive, or divinatory purposes." In fact, the *Gushi* culture would seem to have done little else, given the extensive care with which the posthumous primo was prepared: The "seed size, colour, and morphology . . . suggest that it was cultivated rather than merely gathered from wild plants"; all the "large stalks or branches" had been removed (the famously inventive Chinese presumably developed an early form of the LP to accommodate this process); and chemical analysis shows that the Sinic chronic was specially chosen for its high THC content. A marketing slogan suggests itself: Xinjiang Gold—Marijuana to Die For.

■ What would Christmas be without some new War on Christmas outrage? Online retailer Amazon.com brought us the latest such with a special promotional sale called "Twelve Days of Holiday." When one of our readers protested to Amazon at this politically correct bowdlerization, Amazon compounded the offense by responding with a boilerplate e-mail worded thus: "Please accept our sincere apologies if you were offended by the use of the word 'Christmas' on our website. Our intention in referring to Christmas is to give specific ordering guidance for a specific holiday, not to exclude other faiths." The retailer has since renamed the promotion "Twelve Days of Christmas." Whether they have put together a new apology sincerely apologizing to customers offended at having received the wrong sincere apology, we do not know.

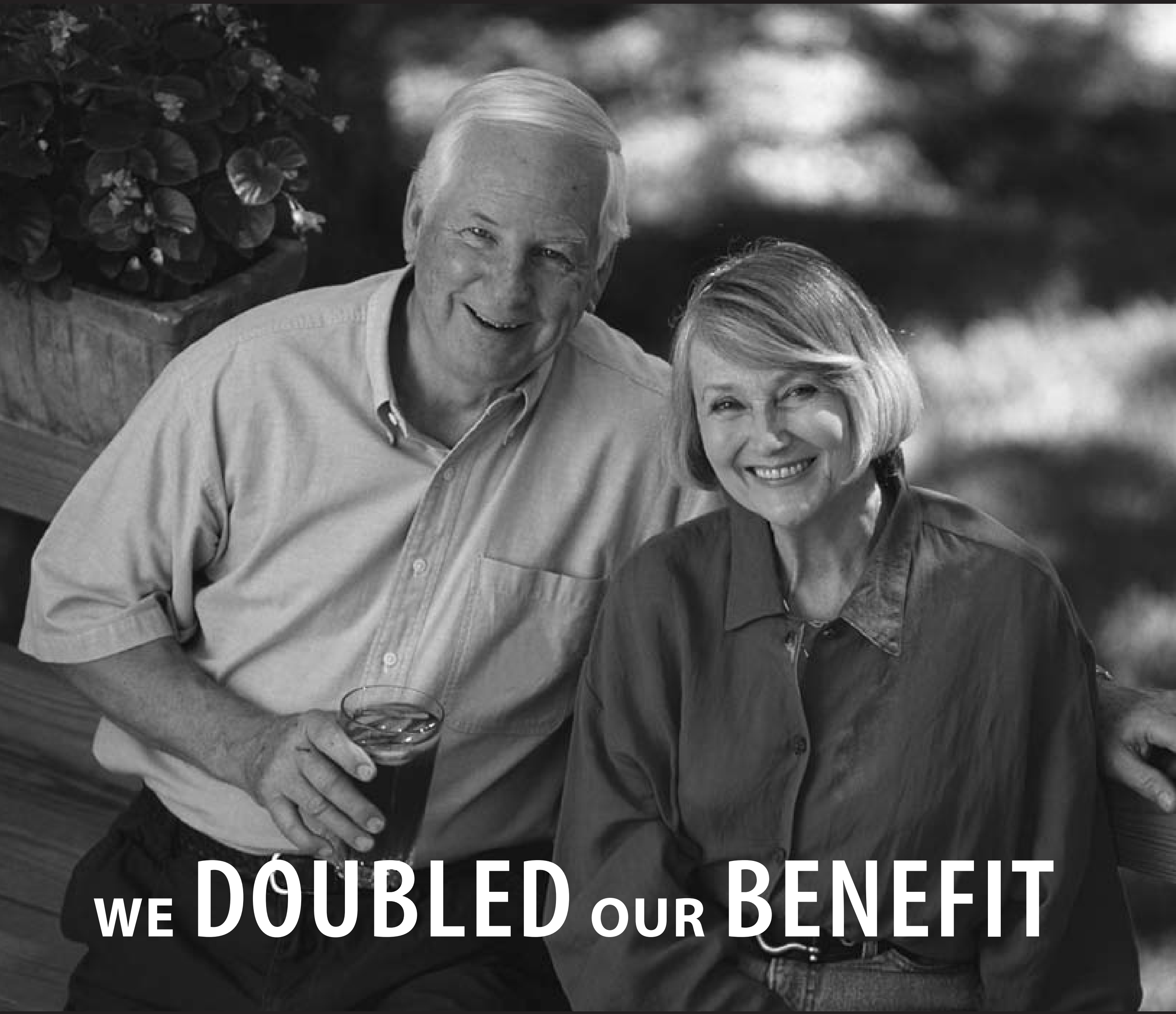
■ The latest manifestation of Che-worship is a film by Steven Soderbergh called, simply, *Che*. It was screened in Havana, of course, under the approving gaze of the Communist dictatorship. The actor playing Guevara, Benicio Del Toro, was there, partying with party members—Cuban officials. It must have been very cozy. And who was Che Guevara, the real one? He was Castro's number-one thug, presiding over summary executions at La Cabaña. That was the fortress that served as his abattoir. He would administer the coup de grâce—a bullet to the back of the neck—while his victims cried, "Vivo Cristo Rey!" or "Viva Cuba libre!" He liked to show off El Paredón, the killing wall turned red with blood. Furthermore, he established the labor-camp system in which countless citizens—dissidents, democrats, artists, homosexuals—would suffer and die. This is the Cuban gulag. Anthony Daniels once remarked that the difference between Guevara and Pol Pot is that Guevara never studied in Paris.

■ In 1994, O. J. Simpson killed two people—Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman—and got off. A civil jury later found him "liable" for some of his crimes, but he continued a free man. Then, in September 2007, he went and broke into a hotel room, armed. He had done so, he said, to reclaim property of his that had been stolen. He has now been convicted of armed robbery and kidnapping, and has been sentenced to 9 to 33 years. His conviction took place 13 years to the day after he got off in the double-murder case. Ron Goldman's father said that this was "some sort of karma—and good karma."

■ The actor Robert Redford has supported left-wing causes for decades, and his Sundance Film Festival is a stalwart supporter of independent films, many with gay themes. Nonetheless, homosexual activists are calling for a boycott of Sundance. Why? Because it's in Utah, where a lot of Mormons live, and Mormons are the source of all evil. Not only did they support California's Proposition 8, which banned same-sex marriage, but, according to the gay-Left blogger John Aravosis, "they quite literally steal your soul at death and force you to convert to their religion." That's why "if you go to Utah, you're funding hate." Now, boycotting an entire state because some of its residents have the wrong views is narrow-minded enough—but if that's your modus operandi, why not boycott the state that actually voted down gay marriage, namely California? And if Utahns really are so virulently homophobic, how exactly are they supposed to feel threatened by the absence of gays?

■ Christmas shopping got you stumped? Here's the ideal present for the man who has everything, or the woman who has everyone: a Planned Parenthood gift certificate, now on sale at PP outlets in Indiana and Illinois. They can be redeemed for health exams, birth control, or what are euphemistically referred to as "other services." How better to celebrate the unplanned birth of Christ?

■ The *New York Times* published a piece by William Ayers on its op-ed page. This was called "The Real Bill Ayers"—and in it, the former Weather Underground leader described an unreal Bill Ayers: just an idealist who may have crossed a line or two, but only hated war and racism. What he did was commit "symbolic acts of extreme vandalism directed at monuments" to those things. Ayers made no mention of the plot against young men and women as they danced at Fort Dix, and no mention of the Brinks murders. (Three men died.) Ayers said that Republicans, having nothing else to



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say, tried to injure Barack Obama through “guilt by association”—association with him. But, thank the Lord, “the politics of fear did not triumph, not this time.” Years ago, having been acquitted of his crimes, Ayers exclaimed, “Guilty as sin, free as a bird—America is a great country.” Yes, what a country, America. And what a newspaper, the *New York Times*.

POLITICS

Looking Back

After September 11, George W. Bush rightly conceived of his as a war presidency. We are now in a stronger position vis-à-vis our enemies than we were when he took office. Then they were gathering force. Now they are on the run. No further attacks on our soil have been made. We cannot say for sure whether we would have been as safe under another president, and we can point to Bush policies that contributed to our safety.

Bush’s decision to oust the Baathist regime in Iraq was the most controversial of his tenure and is now the most widely condemned. But Iraq now has a fighting chance to become a stable country that poses no threat to its neighbors or to us, and even an ally. If that happy prospect materializes, Bush will deserve credit for a major strategic advance. The cost has been dear: dearer than it would have been if Bush had changed his strategy in Iraq earlier, and that consideration too must be weighed in judging his record. He has nonetheless shown far better judgment and character than a political establishment that largely approved the initial invasion of Iraq and then sought to abandon it to terrorists.

Liberals, including historians who ought to know better, have said that Bush might be the country’s worst president ever. That judgment reflects the partisan hysteria that gripped liberals throughout the Bush years.

Bush’s other foreign accomplishments include the disarming of Libya and the substantial strengthening of ties with India. Afghanistan is not as safe a haven for terrorists as it was at the start of Bush’s presidency, although we have much work left to do there and in Pakistan. Our capacity to defend ourselves from missiles has grown, and our military is—belatedly—growing. On the negative side of the ledger, Bush leaves unfinished and messy business in Iran and North Korea. China has grown richer without growing more pacific. Russia has backslid, as has Latin America.

We often disagreed with Bush on domestic policy, opposing him on education, immigration, spending, and much else. Even where we agreed on policy, we sometimes disagreed on strategy, as on Social Security. He leaves behind a government that has, since 2000, grown larger without being much reformed. He also leaves behind a tax code that is significantly more conducive to long-term growth than the one he found—if, that is, his most important tax cuts stay for the long term (see previous sentence).

Other than tax cuts, Bush’s chief contribution to the economy has come from blocking bad policies such as energy rationing. His administration pursued a short-sighted and inflationary weak-dollar policy. Bush recognized some of the danger that Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac posed to the economy but failed to act forcefully enough; he led both parties in encouraging the credit-unworthy to become “homeowners,” with disastrous results.

Bush’s judicial appointments were stellar. John Roberts and Samuel Alito have already done a lot of good at the Supreme Court, and we hope they will continue to do so for decades. Bush at least ties with Ronald Reagan as the modern president most committed to the sanctity of human life—and on stem cells Bush faced more political pressure than Reagan ever did.

Liberals, including historians who ought to know better, have said that Bush might be the country’s worst president ever. That judgment reflects the partisan hysteria that gripped liberals throughout the Bush years. We would place him in the middle ranks of American presidents. It is a pity he did not do better; we are about to do worse.

AT WAR

The Indian Front

The attack on Bombay offers the grim prospect of much future bloodshed. Here were Muslim terrorists who, in the manner of commandos at war, crossed in small boats from Pakistan to India intending to kill 5,000 people. Their training was highly professional, their equipment first-rate, their determination unwavering. Firing indiscriminately, they made sure to kill Hindus and Christians, but they also sought out Jewish victims. In other words, they had given themselves the right to execute anyone and everyone who happened not to be a Muslim. Such is the nature of the jihad in which Islamists are now proud to engage.

Jihad has its structure, its institutions. These particular terrorists were members of Lashkar-e-Taiba, a group in Pakistan that purportedly exists to “liberate” Indian-held Kashmir. Alongside the group stand al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Nominally these groups are banned in the country, yet they operate quite openly, offering military training under cover of religious dedication. Thousands of poverty-stricken youths are fodder for them. Here is a slow-motion revolution, and it would be inconceivable without the backing of the crypto-Islamist Pakistani intelligence service, the ISI, whose loyalties are notoriously two-faced. Accordingly, a whole range of terror-masters are free to choose whether to target Afghanistan, Palestine, some objective that harms the West,

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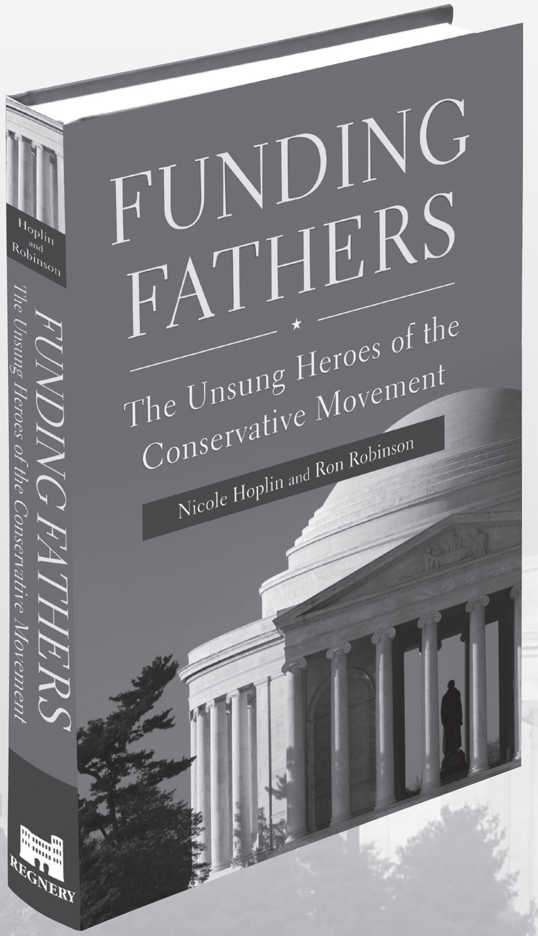
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or now India, as circumstances and their ambitions dictate. That too is the nature of this jihad.

Pakistani president Asif Ali Zardari is in the opening months of his term in office. A self-declared democrat and reformer, he has the frontline task of resisting and defeating Islamist terror. It is by no means certain that he has enough support either from the ISI and the army or from the population at large to be able to do so. His reaction to the Bombay outrage has veered between apology and wishful thinking. It was rather pitiful for him to plead that the terrorists may not have come from Pakistan, when they had taken no trouble to hide the electronic trail of their route from Karachi to Bombay. The confession of the one captured terrorist fills in the details of the Pakistani background of them all. Now at last, after a shootout in a raid on one of their bases, a number of terrorists and their ringleaders have reportedly been arrested.

The Indian government wants a great deal more, asking for named Islamist leaders to be extradited and brought to trial. Many Indians on the street are calling for war as the proper response. The Muslim Council in Bombay has taken the unprecedented step of appealing to all cemeteries in India to refuse to bury the nine dead terrorists. Well-meant appeals by the Indian prime minister, Manmohan Singh, for unity and restraint do not allay the anger and the fear aroused by the atrocity. The terrorists have brought the two nuclear-armed rivals of the sub-continent face to face.

Some in the West have criticized "War on Terror" as a description of events too loose or too open-ended to be meaningful. But time and again the terror-masters and their recruits prove that they really do see themselves at war with the whole of non-Muslim mankind. Unmistakably, such is the nature of jihad. There can be no reasoning with this enemy. As the issue is ideological and global, there can also be no avoiding it.

THE ECONOMY

Will It Stimulate?

President-elect Obama proposes to stimulate the economy through augmented spending on public-works projects ranging from road repairs to improving the energy efficiency of federal office buildings. There are two questions to be answered here: (1) Will these projects have the desired stimulative effect? (2) Are these projects worth undertaking on their own merits?

These questions, moreover, may point in different directions. If the purpose of the spending is Keynesian "stimulus," then inefficiency is not a problem and may indeed be a blessing: The important thing is to get the money out the door to people who will spend it. If, on the other hand, the purpose is to improve our infrastructure, then we will fund cost-effective projects that may not generate many new jobs immediately.

As economists Susan Woodward and Robert Hall note, such work as retrofitting federal office buildings with energy-efficient technology will rely heavily upon firms and workers with narrow expertise, already much in demand. New spending to support highly skilled workers and specialized firms is not likely to stimulate employment, nor is it likely to have a large effect on the overall economy. Instead, it will probably serve mainly to widen the profit margins of engineering firms, specialized contractors, big-equipment makers such as Caterpillar and Terex, and, never forget, the political fixers who will make it all happen.

The question is whether Obama's cherished infrastructure agenda can be ramped up quickly enough to calm the economic seas of the next twelve to eighteen months, which may be dark and stormy.

If the economic forecasts are correct, the U.S. economy in 2009 will have about $1 trillion of the stuffing knocked out of it through lost growth. That's a real beating, but the economy will recover on its own steam, eventually, without a massive transfusion of federal appropriations. The question, then, is whether Obama's cherished infrastructure agenda can be ramped up quickly enough to calm the economic seas of the next twelve to 18 months, which may be dark and stormy. Obama's platoons of bureaucrats-in-waiting are desperately seeking projects that are "shovel ready," but that's a complicated business. Even going to the states and cities, cash in hand, with offers to fund projects now on hold may not suffice; given the burdensome bidding and procurement processes that lade government at all levels, it could be months or years before the work is begun.

The most likely and least desirable outcome is that a passel of new spending projects of questionable worth will be green-lighted quickly by a panicked Congress, only to remain mired in bureaucracy until the recovery already is under way, and then live on, in that twilight zone of immortality presided over by the appropriations gods, long after the crisis that inspired them has passed. In that case we will have added to the national debt without having added to the national well-being.

We believe there are better options for stimulating employment, such as reducing the payroll tax. But improvements to the infrastructure may be worth making for their contribution to long-term growth even if they do not boost the economy in the short term. The benefits of making federal buildings energy efficient may exceed the costs, for example, in which case we should do it. But such projects should be undertaken one at a time, on their individual merits, as conditions and financial constraints allow, not advanced recklessly in the shadow of financial panic. The economic amphetamine of 2009 will become an economic barbiturate when the bills come due. And the bills will come due.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The next issue of NATIONAL REVIEW will appear on Jan. 8. Merry Christmas!

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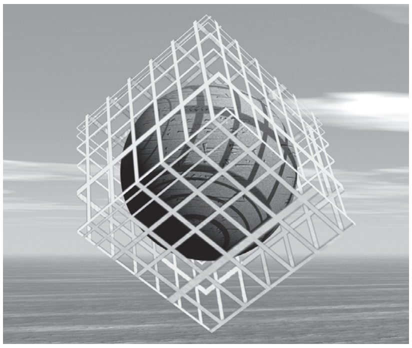
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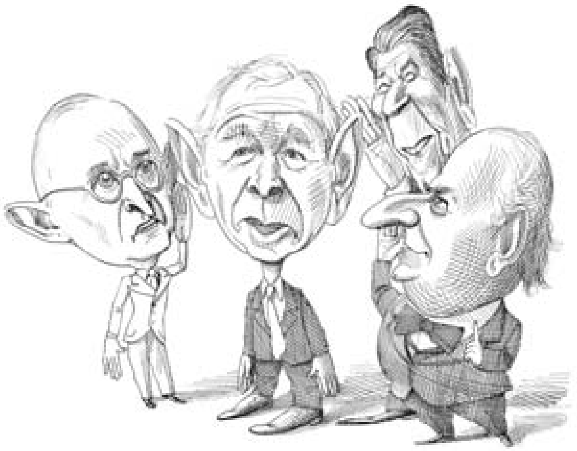

ROMAN GENN

■ COVER STORY ■

The Politics of Everyman

George W. Bush, American—and his mélange of influences

JOHN O'SULLIVAN

During the 2004 election campaign, I was invited to take part in a BBC discussion of the nature of the Bush presidency. It was a lively debate, but I was miscast. The BBC wanted a conservative defender of the president, and my main argument was that Bush wasn't a conservative. Experience has since taught me the futility of trying to demonstrate this.

Conservatives don't need telling. Most already know it and can readily list the president's liberal sins—his overspending, his gutting of education reform to win the support of Teddy Kennedy, his wink and nod to the Supreme Court to defend racial preferences, his quintupling of federal funds for bilingual education, his creation of a new drug entitlement program, etc., etc.

But non-conservatives (and especially liberals) find the concept of a non-conservative George W. Bush utterly impossible to grasp. In the radio debate the man from the *Guardian* heard me out and then, trying to make sense of an argument he clearly thought deranged, said in a kindly way: "Yes, John is quite correct. Bush isn't a conservative. He's a right-wing radical."

Bush is, of course, nothing of the sort. No definition of a right-wing radical, however broad, can possibly be reconciled with the list of Bush's Left-progressive policies cited above. When pressed for evidence to support their claims, liberal critics have to fall back on the Iraq invasion.

Now, the invasion of Iraq can be reasonably described as radical. But there is nothing particularly right-wing about dislodging a fascist dictator on grounds that combined democracy promotion, humanitarian intervention, opposition to nuclear proliferation, and the enforcement of U.N. resolutions. Indeed, the case for the Iraq invasion is a litany of liberal-interventionist beliefs. That perhaps explains why almost every prominent Democrat except for Barack Obama (who hadn't been elected to the Senate yet) supported the invasion (and why many right-wing radicals such as Pat Buchanan were firmly opposed to it).

So if Bush is neither a conservative nor a right-wing radical, could he then be, ahem, a liberal progressive? It is tempting to argue that case (and I have done so in the past), but the list of the Bush administration's conservative policies, though shorter than the list of its liberal ones, is still too substantial to ignore. Notable among them are tax cuts, judicial appointments, and pro-life policies on abortion and stem-cell research. Plainly, there is a conservative thread in the Bush tartan.

Could it be a new sort of "compassionate conservatism"? In 2003 Labor Day remarks to the Ohio Operating Engineers, Bush said: "We have a responsibility that when somebody hurts, government has got to move." The remark was subsequently reflected in policies on poverty, immigration, democracy promotion, faith-based initiatives, foreign aid, and much else. It reflects something elemental in Bush's personality. But what exactly?

My initial response to compassionate conservatism was to feel that it was redundant, vain, and self-serving. It was redundant because relieving poverty and improving the condition of the people have been important strands of every conservatism since Edmund Burke. It was vain because it indulged in an act of moral self-congratulation. And it was self-serving because it suggested that all other conservatisms were lacking in compassion.

So I felt that the Pharisee who proclaimed in the temple: "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week. I give tithes of all that I possess" (Luke 18:11–12) was the first compassionate conservative.

But it turns out I was looking on the bright side.

Definitions and elaborations of the concept are not to be expected from Bush personally. As philosophers go, he is the strong, silent type. Besides, he and others have granted the credit for this theme to the president's first chief speechwriter, Michael Gerson, who subsequently joined the *Washington Post* as a columnist and wrote a book, *Heroic Conservatism*, to advance the doctrine. And in his various writings and speeches, Gerson is not so much morally condescending to other conservatisms as downright hostile.

His particular bête noire is what he calls "libertarian conservatism" or "small-government conservatism." In a seminar held by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, Gerson defined his heroic/compassionate model specifically as "a rejection of libertarian and traditional anti-government ideology in favor of a conservatism of the common good influenced by Catholic social thought. It tries to take the principles of solidarity with the poor and the weak seriously." Gerson also claims to "take the principle of limited government seriously" by employing mediating institutions rather than government bureaucracy to achieve his vision of social justice.

To begin with, the idea that libertarian conservatism ignores or despises the poor is

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a libel. Some eccentric libertarians may do so, but the single most distinguished and influential libertarian conservative in our lifetime was the late Milton Friedman. His focus was on limiting government power—in everything from budgetary policy to narcotics regulation—but Friedman was also the inventor of the negative income tax, education vouchers, and a thousand other schemes to lift people out of poverty.

Second, there is nothing in compassionate conservatism to compel governments to prioritize. All the pressures in government are to finance new social projects (especially when opposing them is the sign of a hard heart). Without the restraint of a "small government" ideology, the easiest course is to choose them all. Overspending, inflation, spiraling deficits, and finally severe fiscal retrenchment are the results. But maybe that point need not be stressed just at present.

Third, compassionate conservatism is myopic. It responds to the victims in view but ignores the invisible victims of its generosity. Thus, the white-male victims of affirmative action are not considered in its debates about racial preferences. Bush's proposed immigration reforms ignored the interests of low-paid, often minority, Americans. Prudent savers today are enduring the economic consequences of policies designed to help imprudent non-savers. And, of course, the taxpayer is the ultimate invisible victim of this cumulative warm-heartedness. As William Graham Sumner said, compassion is A getting together with B to decide what C shall do for X.

In other words, compassionate conservatism is less a political philosophy than a romantic cult of sensibility. It responds to "suffering situations" but lacks mechanisms for preferring one project to another or for setting an overall limit on government. Thus it liberated the president to "move" when "somebody hurts" without first calculating the consequences.

But isn't that how most voters feel? Political scientists often point out that most voters believe the same things—but also that those beliefs change, often quite rapidly, in response to events. Except for the political extremes, Americans lack an ideology that forces them to restrain their impulses, reconcile conflicting values, or maintain a stable policy. And being generous people, when somebody hurts, they move.

If a government acts on the same basis, its policies will be a patchwork quilt of left and right measures. And, to paraphrase Errol Flynn on his own economics, its net income will be insufficient to cover its gross habits.

As his record shows, Bush is simply the ordinary American writ powerful.

There is even some evidence that he sees things that way. Just recently, talking to a group of sympathetic journalists, he launched into a fierce defense of Harriet Miers, arguing that she was a decent and able Texas lawyer scorned by the legal elites of the Ivy League. She would have brought a commonsense approach to the Supreme Court. Etc., etc.

So is Bush—gasp!—a populist?

Not really. Populism is the idea that ordinary Americans are politically wiser and more realistic than elites. That is probably true—and certainly so today when our elites are cosseted against reality and thus more likely to be dupes of ideological fashion. Bush, however, was a cafeteria populist. He gained politically from being seen as an ordinary American. He occasionally talked populism. But he also proved quite capable of resisting the people's wisdom when it clashed with his moral certainties. He gave undeviating support (on compassionate grounds) for a "comprehensive" immigration reform that was supported by business (and other) elites and twice defeated by popular resistance. When elite opinion clashed with popular wisdom, he chose the side that echoed his inner evangelical impulses.

All presidencies are shaped powerfully by the president's personality. But the Bush presidency seems more personal, even impulsive, and less influenced by either party or ideology than most. In which case the quality of Bush's personality becomes all-important. And just as compassionate conservatism lacks a guiding "governor," so the Bush personality seems to lack a similar mechanism of impulse control. Sometimes his impulses are right, notably the surge; sometimes mistaken, notably immigration; almost always they prevail.

Which is why the best description of the Bush presidency was formulated almost 100 years ago by the great Canadian humorist Stephen Leacock: "He flung himself from the room, flung himself upon his horse and rode madly off in all directions." **NR**

■ **COVER STORY II**

'The Freedom Speech' in Retrospect

It was not the grossly simplistic vision of the second inaugural that saved Iraq

RICHARD LOWRY

How does President Bush's second inaugural address, meant to be the defining speech of his presidency, look in retrospect? Exactly the way it seemed at the time—a grossly simplistic vision of the universal victory of liberty that created an impossible standard for Bush to meet in his second term.

Inaugural addresses by their nature are soaring rather than programmatic, aspirational rather than concrete. The basic idealism of President Bush's address is firmly within the mainstream of the American foreign-policy tradition and echoes the rhetoric of Ronald Reagan, especially his 1982 address to members of Parliament at Westminster Palace. Arguing that freedom is "the inalienable and universal right of all human beings," Reagan expressed his confidence in the "march of freedom and democracy which will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash-heap of history."

Reagan's speech included caveats ("We must be cautious about forcing the pace of change"), and so did Bush's. Even as he set out "the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world," Bush said that it "is the concentrated work of generations" and noted "the difficulty of the task." But Bush seemed too often to believe his most sweeping formulations were an actual guide to how the world works, and, as such, the address formed the intellectual backdrop to the failures of the Iraq War.

According to immensely talented former Bush speechwriter Mike Gerson's book *Heroic Conservatism*, Bush told Gerson he wanted the inaugural to be "the freedom speech." The freedom speech was what he got, in Gerson's characteristically writing-for-the-ages tones, without enough consideration of how the stirring words related to reality.

"The survival of liberty in our land," Bush said, "increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands." In the context of the War on Terror, this is false. Terrorists have thrived more in ungoverned spaces than in tyrannies. In this sense, the threat to the survival of our liberty is the absence of strong states—in places like northwest Pakistan, Iraq prior to the surge, Somalia—rather than the absence of freedom. Iran is a tyranny that sponsors terror and represents a threat to American interests, but if it were a garden-variety Middle Eastern authoritarian regime allied to the United States, we wouldn't care so much about its political system.

Bush insisted that "America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one." This assertion of a harmonic convergence between our interests and values is based on the belief that tyrannies foster terrorism, and also on the straightforward observation that the states most hostile to the United States are dictatorships. Not all tyrannies are incubators of terror, however, and some tyrannies are our allies. The world is much too complicated for there ever to be a perfect identity between our interests and our values, and compromise and judgments based on gradations of grey will always be the coin of international relations.

Bush didn't merely exhort, he promised to act on his rhetoric. In the kind of language that caused worried embassies to call the White House in the aftermath of the address, Bush declared, "We will encourage reform in other governments by making clear that success in our relations will require the decent treatment of their own people."

Back in the real world, Bush couldn't possibly act consistently on this pledge. The administration spent years propping up a general who took power in a coup in Pakistan, believing he was better than the alternative, including the country's democratic opposition. Its bulwark in the Persian Gulf was Saudi Arabia, a country notorious for its denial of basic freedoms. An embarrassed Condi Rice traveled to Egypt and didn't even speak in public the name of dissident Ayman Nour because doing this would so irk the government, with which smooth relations were more immediately important than human rights.

The way Bush handled relations with each of these countries was eminently reasonable, but his inaugural address set up his pragmatism to appear as if it were self-betrayal.

The address was informed by an incomplete view of human motivation and psychology. "Eventually, the call of freedom comes to every mind and every soul," Bush asserted. This is fine as aspirational rhetoric, but it's probably not true. Countless millions of people all over the world are concerned more with survival than with freedom, more desperate for communal power than for liberty, more willing to fight for the preservation of tradition than for democracy. Especially in the remote places, tribal societies, and failed states that provide most of the landscape of the War on Terror.

Early in the war, Bush and his administration seemed to believe that Iraq was inhabited by the abstractions of his second inaugural, rather than real people motivated by more immediate concerns than the "call of freedom." When Iraq nearly descended irrevocably into civil war in 2006, its downward slide would have been inexplicable to the George W. Bush of the second inaugural.

That descent was driven by a lack of order (because of insufficient U.S. troop levels and a weak Iraqi government), by history (the minority Sunnis were used to ruling the majority Shiites), by a power struggle (among and within the key ethnic groups), and by sheer bloodlust (once the cycle of revenge really got going). The pure concept of freedom as outlined in the second inaugural didn't have much of anything to do with it, nor with the solution.

The surge was an application of force to restore order. A key element of it was the Anbar Awakening: the revolt of the Sunni tribes against al-Qaeda. They didn't fight for an abstract notion of freedom, but to defend their way of life and their homes against foreign Islamic extremists. They fought for their honor and their traditions. Talk to the American military officers involved in the surge's success and they will tell you how important it was to be immersed in Iraqi culture and know the key tribal players in their particulars—who really has influence, who hates whom and why, etc.

Bush gave a nod to the world's distinctive cultural landscape in his address, but it was only a nod. "When the soul of a nation finally speaks, the institutions that arise may reflect customs and traditions very different from our own," Bush said. The "soul of the nation" was presumed to speak only when a country embraces democratic institutions. But surely we have seen something of the soul of Russia in the czarist, Communist, and Putin eras, or the soul of China under the emperor, Mao, and its current authoritarian capitalism.

It can't become an excuse for repression or savagery, but a statesman should have a keen appreciation of the world's cultural differences, as expressed by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in his 1970 Nobel lecture: "The disappearance of whole nations would impoverish us no less than if all people were to become identical, with the same character and the same face. Nations are the wealth of humanity, its generalized personalities. The least among them has its own special colors, and harbors within itself a special aspect of God's design."

Foreign policy shouldn't be over-ideologized. It has to be an intensely practical exercise, carried out with prudence and wisdom. Sweeping theories need not apply. The nation's interests must be paramount, and usually—but not always—they will be coincident with the spread of more open and democratic societies.

It is true that in the fight with Islamic extremists, we have to offer a positive alternative. As Bush put it in an Oval Office interview recently, "The ability to defeat an enemy ideologically is to offer a better ideology." But there is a lot of appealing ground between the dark vision of al-Qaeda and the universal vindication of the Declaration of Independence that Bush set out in his Second Inaugural. For most of the hearts and minds for which we are fighting in the greater Middle East, basically competent and just government is probably an alluring enough alternative—and difficult enough to achieve.

If a somewhat stable and democratic Iraq endures, Bush will have forged a historic accomplishment. He will have replaced an enemy with an ally, a dictatorship with something better. As conservatives debate a post-Bush foreign policy, they'd be well advised to start with how Bush saved Iraq post-2006—in a culturally attuned counterinsurgency campaign with the minimalist goal of ousting al-Qaeda while accommodating traditional local players—rather than with the millennial vision of the second inaugural. In this case, it's do as he did, not as he said. **NR**

■ COVER STORY III

Diplomatic Health

On Bush, our alliances, and varied perceptions

JAY NORDLINGER

IF there's one thing everyone knows, it's this: America's alliances are in tatters and the American image abroad is terrible. George W. Bush has eschewed diplomacy and sacrificed the good name of the United States. Our alliances, our image, and our name need to be "restored."

When President-elect Obama chose Hillary Clinton as secretary of state, she vowed to "reach out to the world again." Obama spoke of his "commitment to renew American diplomacy and restore our alliances." Bill Clinton chimed in that his wife was "the right person for the job of helping to restore America's image abroad." And Democrats aren't the only ones who talk this way. Some Republicans are in on this act too (e.g., John McCain, late of the presidential campaign).

So, everyone "knows" that our alliances are tattered, etc. But is it true? When people talk to you about these suffering alliances, you might ask them to go country by country. That could embarrass them. And in a recent meeting with NATIONAL REVIEW writers in the Oval Office, President Bush said, "All I ask is that people analyze our alliances around the world" before they come to any conclusions. In that spirit, shall we have a quick tour d'horizon?

Let's start with Western Europe, the region that so many Americans think of when they think of "the world." Those relations wax and wane, as all international relations do, but American alliances with Western European governments are in good shape. Anyone doubting this can ask such people as Brown, Sarkozy, Merkel, and Berlusconi. And that is not to forget the Dutch, the Danes, and others who are often forgotten about. One should not forget the Eastern Europeans, either.

There is one European government with which American relations are now difficult: that of Spain. That's because Prime Minister Zapatero is determined to be a thorn in the American side (unlike his predecessor, Aznar). One might wish the Obama administration luck with him.

Inconveniently for Bush-bashers, the American image in Africa is quite good. This is in part because of Bush's programs on AIDS and malaria—and because of his attention to the continent generally. But the idea of Bush as a popular leader among black peoples is just too much for many folks to swallow.

Relations between India and the U.S. are at an all-time high. And Bush himself makes the point that this has occurred while the U.S. has "kept influence" in Pakistan. Moving east, he says that it's hard for any president to say that he and America have good relations with Japan, South Korea, and China at the same time—but he can say that. Others point out that our relations with Japan have been complicated by our relative softness on North Korea. But Bush's critics, most of them, do not fault him for softness on North Korea, or any other country.

There are Chinese democracy activists who are disappointed in Bush for not doing more to prod China. Some of them even talk of "betrayal"—a betrayal of such promises as those made in the second inaugural address. Why did Bush go to the Beijing Olympics without the release of even one political prisoner? But, again, the average Bush critic does not condemn him for being too accommodating.

Relations with Latin American countries are good—and the U.S. enjoys especially warm relations with Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil. In our Oval Office visit, Bush recounted how he, a Texas conservative, found common ground with Lula da Silva, a Brazilian socialist. (They are both democrats, for one thing.) And will relations with Colombia get even better under Obama, given his opposition to a free-trade agreement with that country? How will his protectionist leanings affect our alliances in general?

There are Latin American countries with which relations are strained—notably Venezuela (Chávez), Bolivia (Morales), and Nicaragua (Ortega). But that has to do with the anti-democratic personalities involved. There is the Castros' Cuba too—against which Bush has done relatively little, save award a political prisoner (Oscar Biscet) the Presidential Medal of Freedom (in absentia). Can you fault him for belligerence toward the Cuban regime?

The Middle East has consumed the lion's share of Bush's time. And he contends that he has achieved something difficult there: promoting a two-state solution, where Israelis and Palestinians are concerned, while at the same time "vowing to defend Israel and keeping strong relations with Saudi Arabia and Jordan and Egypt and the U.A.E." The U.S. now has an ally in Iraq (ahem). And Bush has even made an ally, or semi-ally, of Moammar Qaddafi, in a most unusual twist of history. Some fault Bush for not doing more to change American allies such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, or to change foes such as Syria. But that is not the point of the "Bush ruined our alliances" crowd.

Russia is an interesting case: Bush has been far from confrontational with Putin, even as Russia has become more problematic. Will relations with Russia be friendlier over the next four years? It seems doubtful, unless Obama pulls missile defense from Eastern European countries, or turns a blind eye generally. Sticking with this part of the world, Bush has wanted Ukraine and Georgia in NATO, while our traditional European allies have not. Who's the more alliance-minded now?

Then there's the nettlesome case of Iran. Just before the U.S. election, I participated in a debate at Yale. The moderator said that Bush had been acting "Mr. Tough Guy" toward Iran. Oh? How? By letting Europeans negotiate—and negotiate—and refraining from attack? Hawkish critics slam Bush for too great a tolerance toward Iran and North Korea; others slam him for swaggering around, wreaking havoc. The person of Bush sets loose an odd variety of perceptions.

Finally, Australia, Canada, Turkey, Israel (can we count Israel?)—relations with them all are good. Those who talk about the need to "restore" U.S. alliances might want to specify which ones need to be restored.

A senior administration official (not the president!) makes a shrewd point, in an entertaining way: "It all comes down to style and attitude. Our alliances are fine. It's just that global elites, including American elites, hate Bush and hate

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The Forgotten Refugees

Why does nobody care about the Jewish refugees from Arab lands?

The world is greatly concerned about the Arabs who fled the nascent state of Israel in 1948. But no mention is ever made of the Jewish refugees from Arab lands. Their history is as compelling and arguably more so than that of the Arab refugees from Israel.

What are the facts?

Jews in Arab countries. Jews have lived since Biblical times in what are now Arab countries. After the Roman conquest, Jews were dispersed, mostly to what are now the Arab countries of North Africa and the Middle East. Many Jews migrated to the Iberian peninsula – Spain and Portugal. They were expelled from those countries at the end of the 15th century. They mostly migrated to the Arab countries, where, by now, they have been living for almost 500 years, many Jews for over 2,000 years.

Jews in Arab Countries

	1948	Now
Algeria	140,000	0
Egypt	75,000	100
Iraq	135,000	100
Lebanon	5,000	100
Libya	38,000	0
Morocco	265,000	5,700
Syria	30,000	100
Tunisia	105,000	1,500
Yemen	55,000	200

There is a myth that Jews had an easy life in Muslim/Arab countries. The opposite is the case. Jews under Islam were treated as second-class citizens and worse. The relationship was governed by a system of discrimination, intended to reduce the Jews in those Arab countries to conditions of humiliation, segregation and violence. They were excluded from society, from government, and from most professions. They were barely tolerated and often, under the slightest pretext or no pretext at all, were victimized by vicious violence.

When Israel declared its statehood in 1948, pogroms broke out across the entire Arab/Muslim world. Thousands died in this violence. Their homes and businesses were destroyed, their women violated. The vast majority of those Jews fled from where they had lived for centuries. They had to leave everything behind. Most of those who were able to escape found their way to the just-created state of Israel.

Over 850,000 Jews were driven from Arab countries, most of them in 1948, at the birth of Israel. Most of the remainder were chased out during or immediately following the Six-Day War in 1967, when, in fury about the disastrous defeat, the "Arab street" erupted and subjected its Jewish population to bloody pogroms. Israel received every one of those Jewish refugees from Arab countries with brotherly open arms; it housed, fed, and quickly integrated them into Israeli society. They and their descendants now make up more than one-half of the country's population.

A different history. It is instructive to compare the history of those Jewish refugees with that of the Arabs who fled from Israel during its War of Independence. There were about 650,000 of them. Most left following the strident invocations of their leaders, who urged them to leave, so as to make room for the invading Arab armies. After victory was to be achieved, they could return to reclaim their property and that of the Jews, all of whom would have been killed or would have fled.

In contrast to the Jewish refugees, who were quickly integrated into Israel, the Arab countries resolutely refused to accept the Arab refugees into their societies. They confined them into so-called refugee camps. Those camps are essentially extended slum cities, where their descendants – now the fourth generation – have been living ever since. The reason for the Arabs' refusal to accept them was and still is the desire to keep them as a festering sore and to make solution of the Arab/Israel conflict impossible. These "refugees," whose number has by now miraculously increased from their original 650,000 to 5 million, are seething with hatred toward Israel and provide the cadres of terrorists and suicide bombers.

The Palestinian refugees occupy a unique place in the concern of the world. Since 1947, there have been over 100 UN resolutions concerning the Palestinian refugees. But there has not been one single resolution addressing the horrible injustices done to the nearly one million Jewish refugees from the Arab states.

There have been many millions of refugees in the wake of the Second World War. With only one exception, none of those refugee groups occupy the interest of the world and of the United Nations in a major way. That one exception are the Palestinian refugees. In fact, a special branch of the United Nations (UNRWA) exists only for the maintenance of those "refugees." In the almost sixty years of the existence of this agency it has cost many billions of dollars, most of it – you guessed it – contributed by the United States.

Jewish refugees from the Arab countries are the forgotten refugees. The world, and especially of course the Arabs, claim compensation from Israel for the Arab refugees and insist on their return to what has been Israel for over 60 years. The Jewish refugees from Arab countries, all Israelis now, have no desire to return to their ancient homelands, where they had been treated so shabbily and so brutally. But if there is to be any compensation, those forgotten Jewish refugees are certainly entitled to such compensation as much as the Arab refugees. Anything else would be an outrage and a great injustice.

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conservatives and hate those who favor a forward American policy. In this administration, we think the worst of the Iranians, but we haven't been belligerent toward them. Same with Chávez. We obviously think the U.N. is basically useless, but our policies haven't reflected that. One of the things I guess people say is, 'Yeah, despite what you do, we know what you really think,' and, in a way, that's right!"

Needless to say, Bush has made mistakes, and at times could have used more finesse. But, in every dispute between America and an ally, or any other foreign power, is America at fault? And do we not subscribe to the Palmerstonian notion that we have, not permanent allies, but permanent interests?

Bush, personally, is unpopular for sure—especially at the *Guardian*, *Le Monde*, and *Der Spiegel*. Iraqis and Afghans might give you a different opinion (as they have me). And if, or when, President Obama acts to protect American interests—will he remain a darling, among chattering classes? Resentment of America, or mixed feelings about us, did not begin with George W. Bush's presidency, and such feelings will not end there.

Bush himself has thought about the question of popularity. "I'd rather be respected than liked," he says. And he expands in this manner: "You can get short-term popularity in the Middle East if you want, by blaming all problems on Israel. That'll make you popular. You can be popular in certain salons of Europe if you say, 'Okay, we'll join the International Criminal Court.' I could have been popular if I'd said, 'Oh, Kyoto is the way to deal with the environmental problem.' That would have made me liked. It would have made me wrong, however. And, ultimately, you earn people's respect by articulating a set of principles and standing by them."

Besides which, "popularity comes and goes. It just does. It comes and goes for an individual or a nation—but principles are enduring."

Paul Johnson, who may be Britain's foremost intellectual, says that he'll start to worry about America's standing in the world when people from all corners of the earth cease to want to come here. Bush (who is a fan of Johnson's, as Johnson is of his) has the same thought: "We are respected, our values are cherished, and the lines are long to come to America." **NR**

COVER STORY IV

A Properly Powerful Executive

Bush has done a solid job of safeguarding presidential prerogatives

MATTHEW J. FRANCK

How fares the constitutional presidency after eight years of George W. Bush? Bloodied but unbowed, I think. Over two terms notable for overheated partisan fears and attacks on the president's use of the Constitution's executive power, the Bush administration has made some ill-considered tactical choices and suffered some setbacks, but by and large has vigorously and successfully defended the constitutional boundaries of the office.

From the beginning, President Bush appeared to understand the constitutional basis of his authority. After a 537-vote victory in Florida gave him a just-enough 271 electoral votes, Bush entered on the duties of his office with a blithe unconcern for the size or even existence of a "mandate" springing from the American people—more of whom across the nation had voted for Al Gore. Evidently recognizing that winning the office, by however narrow a margin, provides all the "mandate" one needs, straight from the Constitution, he vigorously pressed his agenda in Washington just as though he had won a landslide. This sent his impassioned opponents even farther round the bend. But Bush should be thanked, and not just by his supporters, for using his power without hesitation. It was good for him, for the presidency as an institution, for the Constitution, and for the country.

America is not well served by a shrinking violet in the Oval Office. The framers of the Constitution rescued republicanism, a form of government that had historically swung back and forth between tyranny and anarchy, by introducing a number of institutional innovations. One of the most significant was the "energetic executive," with independent constitutional power concentrated in one individual, who is thereby made more powerful and more responsible than any shared-power arrangement would be, and who can act as a counterweight to an otherwise too-powerful legislature. The Constitution is built on an expectation of friction in the separation of powers, and its purposes are advanced by presidents who see their policy ambitions as bound up with an expansive notion of their office's powers. "The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place," said James Madison in *The Federalist*. These rights include reining in Congress when it overreaches, exercising vigorous leadership in foreign relations, and waging war with sufficient latitude to protect the nation from destruction.

Mr. Franck is a visiting fellow in the James Madison Program at Princeton University, professor and chairman of political science at Radford University, and a blogger at National Review Online's Bench Memos.

So how should we assess George W. Bush's maintenance of the "constitutional rights of the place"?

The veto. President Bush will leave office having vetoed fewer bills than any president in modern times—just twelve vetoes so far, of which Congress has overridden four. His first term ended with an astounding zero vetoes, a record last seen in a completed four-year term when John Quincy Adams was president. But is a record of few vetoes a sign of passivity, or of strength on Capitol Hill? In Bush's case, it may be a little of both. Conservatives have chafed at Bush's willingness to sign all manner of spending bills, but when one's party controls the Congress, fiscal restraint should be accomplished before the bills pass in the first place. That didn't happen. What the president got from congressional Republicans while they jointly spent all that money was their general support of his wartime presidency. Judged not on fiscal or electoral grounds, but on constitutional ones, this may not have been a bad bargain. Eleven of Bush's twelve vetoes, some in direct defense of presidential power, have occurred since the Democrats took over Congress after the 2006 elections.

Signing statements. While President Bush was signing all those bills, he continued a practice that dates back to James

Monroe but gathered steam under Ronald Reagan: the "signing statement," which can explain the president's understanding of a law's limited reach under the Constitution—especially marking off the encroachments on his power that he will not countenance. Bush signed scores of such statements, but not outlandishly many compared with Reagan, Clinton, or his own father. And if one such statement is legitimate, what is wrong with a hundred?

Still, given so many, one wonders: Was this Bush's substitute for the veto he was so chary of using? Perhaps, but in the contemporary legislative environment, with its multi-subject authorization bills and massive spending resolutions (some up against the fiscal calendar in wartime), it is hard to fault a pattern of decisions to accept any legislation that can reasonably be interpreted in a friendly fashion. With little historical understanding and less constitutional warrant, the president's critics tried to gin up a sense of crisis about his signing statements. But the practice has been ably defended through administrations of both parties, and will doubtless continue under President Obama. Perhaps Bush's enemies will belatedly discover that the president is a constitutional officer and not the legislature's errand boy.

Commander-in-chief. In the elite media and the legal academy, one hears the constant cry that, under the rubric of war powers, "Bush is shredding the Constitution!" Historic practice and jurisprudence make such claims hard to credit. Jack Goldsmith, the former head of the Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) in the Bush Justice Department, rightly notes in his 2007 memoir *The Terror Presidency* that Bush has been the first war president to face "a hornet's nest of complex criminal restrictions on his traditional wartime discretionary powers." Unquestionably these restrictions make warfighting harder, with the president pulled between the imperatives of safeguarding the national security and respecting sometimes ambiguous legal obligations. President Bush has fortunately had very able lawyers in the executive branch who have helped him navigate these waters and advocate the cause of a vigorous commander-in-chief.

Goldsmith was one of those advocates, and his sympathy for the president's purposes makes him one of the administration's most cogent and balanced critics. He slams what he sees as its "open chest-thumping about the importance of maintaining and expanding executive power," criticizes its "go-it-alone approach" when it might have accomplished more by working more cooperatively with Congress, and concludes that on some matters the desire of administration officials to "leave the presidency stronger than they found it" was pursued in ways that "seemed to have achieved the opposite." With the evidence of some arguably improvident (and subsequently leaked) memos on interrogation techniques, some losses at the Supreme Court in the Guantanamo detainee cases, and the continuing lack of any comprehensive legislation for dealing with the terrorist threat, Goldsmith has a pretty good case.

On the other side, however, are the arguments of John Yoo, a former deputy at OLC who served before Goldsmith's time, the unapologetic drafter of the interrogation memos Goldsmith withdrew, and perhaps the legal academy's most forceful advocate of expansive executive war powers under the Constitution. In his 2006 book *War by Other Means*, Yoo argues that while "no grand statute" has been enacted for terrorist detentions and trials, nevertheless "congressional support for the war is a fact of life," with the entire war effort resting on Congress's funding, its authorization of the use of force, and the oversight of its leaders and committees. Beyond this minimal congressional involvement, he says, the president does not need any specific authorization; asking for it would only weaken the presidency. Yoo thinks we are better off in wartime with an active presidency and a largely hands-off Congress, due to the legislature's "size, disorganization, and unwillingness to take political risks," as well as the inherently less flexible nature of legislative efforts to pursue war aims.

Both men's views have merit, and together they summarize the conundrum of executive power. Every president, especially in wartime, must weigh how much to claim unilateral power and how much to work with Congress. But two things are striking about the Yoo–Goldsmith debate.

The first is that their disagreement takes place almost entirely on the terrain of political science and not constitutional law. They differ on how well the Bush administration pressed its case in Congress, the courts, and the public arena, but agree that as a constitutional matter, the administration's position was virtually unassailable. When Goldsmith describes the Supreme Court's first habeas corpus ruling on the Guantanamo detainees, *Rasul* v. *Bush* in 2004, as "turning somersaults" with the law, prompted more by "extralegal factors" than by "controlling legal precedents," Yoo would agree. And when Yoo remarks that the Court that decided *Hamdan* v. *Rumsfeld* two years later "displayed a lack of judicial restraint that would have shocked its predecessors," Goldsmith could have said as much. But if Goldsmith is right in his assessment of the "extralegal factors" in play in the modern judiciary, then the presidency's approach to the Supreme Court must be of essentially the same kind as its approach to Congress, the public, and the media. This is a truly alarming development, suggesting that what matters in the Court is not legal arguments and precedent but rhetorical appeals and the flattering of prejudices. The judge becomes just another low sort of politician.

The second—and related—thing worth mentioning was exposed in the most recent Guantanamo case, *Boumediene* v. *Bush*, which was decided after both Yoo and Goldsmith published their books and renders some of their disagreements irrelevant. In *Boumediene*, facing a Congress and president who had joined forces a second time to tell the justices to butt out, the Court overturned an act of Congress and held, for the first time in history, that foreign enemies captured on foreign fields, presumptively having violated the laws of war, and held by our military beyond American shores, are entitled to the constitutional privilege of habeas corpus in civilian trial courts. Again, this occurred after *both* the elected branches responsible for wartime policy had decided otherwise.

This legal "astonisher," as Lincoln would have called it, shows that the real story of war powers under the Constitution since 9/11 has not been a tale of the ebb and flow of executive power in relation to Congress and the courts. It has been a tale of judicial aggrandizement at the expense of both the other branches, with significant costs for the rule of law and republicanism. The Bush administration has held up its end under the Constitution, so far with no outright crippling of presidential war powers. But for the sake of both victory and the Constitution, we have reason to wish Commander-in-Chief Barack Obama better success in his own encounters with the judiciary. **NR**

■ COVER STORY V

Supreme Success

Thanks to Bush, we have a chance for a Roberts Court

EDWARD WHELAN

DWIGHT EISENHOWER called his appointments of Chief Justice Earl Warren and Justice William Brennan his two biggest mistakes as president. With ample reason, George W. Bush regards his appointments of Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Samuel Alito as two of his best decisions.

In the space of barely six months, from mid-July 2005 to the end of January 2006, President Bush achieved what his Republican predecessors since Eisenhower each failed to accomplish through the whole of their presidencies: the nomination, confirmation, and appointment of two new justices whose sterling qualifications appear to include a deep commitment to respect the broad play the Constitution gives to the operations of representative government. It's too early, to be sure, to take for granted that Roberts and Alito will prove to be superb justices over the long haul and that they will resist the temptation to "grow" to curry the favor of the liberal elites in legal academia and the media. But their strong performance in their initial years on the Court and their admirable characters and temperaments justify lofty expectations.

Lest Bush's 2-for-2 record on Supreme Court appointments be underappreciated, it is important to recall that the great Ronald Reagan went only 1 for 3 (a stellar pick in Antonin Scalia, but tragic failings in Sandra Day O'Connor and Anthony Kennedy)—or 2 for 4 if you include his elevation of William Rehnquist to chief justice. Bush's father batted 1 for 2 (the home run of Clarence Thomas, preceded by the dismal whiff of David Souter).

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To the essential virtue of judicial restraint, Roberts and Alito both add the virtue of (relative) youth. Roberts, who became the youngest chief justice since John Marshall, is still only 53, and Alito is 58. It is reasonable to hope that they—and Clarence Thomas, who is only 60 (and nine years younger than the next youngest justice)—will serve on the Court for a long time to come.

The fiasco of the Harriet Miers nomination must be acknowledged. Whatever Miers's merits, she was surely not in the top tier of qualified Supreme Court candidates. As Reagan did with O'Connor in 1981, Bush made the mistake of deciding in advance that his nominee must be a woman, and Miers was somehow the only one left standing after other, better-qualified candidates were knocked off the list. The conservative movement deserves credit for grasping the importance of what was at stake and objecting vociferously (some publicly, others privately). Bush in the end also deserves credit for taking the difficult step of withdrawing the nomination of his longtime friend. Thus, a Justice Miers is not part of his legacy in the way that O'Connor, alas, is part of Reagan's.

While President Bush earns the highest marks for Chief Justice Roberts and Justice Alito, his project of restoring the Court to its proper role in a constitutional republic remains incomplete for the simple reason that he was presented with only two Supreme Court vacancies over his eight years in office. The "Roberts Court" bears that title only as a formality, as Chief Justice Roberts is one vote short of a working majority that is broadly aligned with his jurisprudential principles. Roberts, Scalia, Thomas, and Alito form a strong core of four, but in politically contentious cases Kennedy frequently sides with, or even leads, the liberal-activist quartet of Stevens, Souter, Ginsburg, and Breyer in inventing newfangled constitutional rights. So, if President-elect Obama fails to inflict irreversible damage on the Court, it will be up to a future president to pick up where Bush left off and build on his excellent progress.

President Bush's record on lower-court appointments is much more mixed. Let's begin with the numbers. Bush appointed 62 judges to the federal courts of appeals. That's even fewer than the 65 that President Clinton appointed, amidst bitter Democratic complaints and media buzz about a confirmation slowdown by Senate Republicans. Bush's total also includes three of Clinton's unsuccessful nominees whom Bush renominated—two in 2001 in unrequited gestures of goodwill, and one in 2008 as part of a Sixth Circuit deal. The numbers for the federal district courts are even worse: 261 Bush appointees versus 305 Clinton appointees. The Bush numbers are all the more disappointing as Republicans controlled the Senate for more than half of the Bush presidency, whereas Clinton enjoyed Democratic control for only two of his eight years.

There's plenty of blame to go around. When they were in the minority, Senate Democrats resorted to unprecedented measures of obstruction. Until the presidency of George W. Bush, there had never been a partisan filibuster against a judicial nominee. In 2003 and 2004, Democrats unleashed the filibuster and succeeded in defeating some 20 cloture petitions on ten different nominees, five of whom—including Miguel Estrada, the superbly qualified nominee to the D.C. Circuit—were never ultimately confirmed. Even as the bipartisan "Gang of 14" agreement in May 2005 permitted some of the filibustered nominees to be confirmed, it undercut what would have been a successful Republican effort to revise Senate rules to forbid the filibuster of judicial nominees.

Many Senate Republicans, meanwhile, seemed to demonstrate more interest in the patronage opportunities that judicial nominations presented them—getting their own home-state folks nominated and confirmed—than in moving Bush's judicial nominees generally. Indeed, the Senate Judiciary Committee under Republican leadership dramatically expanded the Senate's "blue slip" policy by giving individual senators an effective veto over judicial nominations in their states (including over federal appellate judgeships, which the laws do not assign by state and whose workload has no more connection to one state than to any other in a circuit). This Senate Republican conferral of extraordinary leverage on obstructionist Democrats explains, for example, why a Fourth Circuit seat regarded as belonging to Maryland has been vacant throughout Bush's presidency—and why so many other seats were filled with compromise candidates.

After retaking control of the Senate in 2007, Democrats were even better positioned to play hardball. Over the last two years, the Senate confirmed only 10 federal appellate judges (including one former Clinton nominee), compared with 15 confirmed by the Republican-controlled Senate in the last two years of the Clinton administration. Among the nominees left languishing were Peter Keisler, a brilliant lawyer whose nomination to the D.C. Circuit in June 2006 received hearty bipartisan acclaim; Robert Conrad, a Fourth Circuit nominee who, like Keisler, received the ABA's highest rating and who had the ardent support of both Republican senators from North Carolina; and Glen Conrad, a Fourth Circuit nominee from Virginia, who was pre-approved by *Democratic* senator James Webb.

The Fourth Circuit, long stalwart in its judicial conservatism, provides perhaps the starkest illustration of the Bush administration's failure to get its nominees confirmed. The 15-member court, which covers Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia, has four vacancies, three of which have existed for the entirety of the Bush presidency. Among the eleven active judges, six are Republican appointees and five (counting Roger Gregory, the Clinton recess appointee who was renominated by Bush) are Democratic. So President-elect Obama will likely soon be able to establish a Democratic majority on the Fourth Circuit.

There is no evidence that the Bush White House ever developed a general strategy to counter Democratic obstruction and Republican indifference in the Senate, and, especially once Democrats regained control of the Senate, it's far from clear what strategy would have been effective.

The good news on the lower courts is that President Bush did succeed in appointing a number of outstanding judges to the courts of appeals, judges who have already made their mark and will continue to do so. Fifteen Bush appointees serving on federal appellate courts are 50 or younger, and several more are just over 50. If and when a future president is ready to help build a real Roberts Court, that president will have plenty of strong Bush appointees to choose from. Let's hope that President Bush's full Supreme Court legacy proves to be even greater than his outstanding appointments of Roberts and Alito. **NR**

■ **TRADITION**

Before You Say No . . .

A correspondence, nonfictional, between a young boy, a housewife, a headmaster, and the young boy's brother

ALOÏSE BUCKLEY HEATH

A Christmas story by the late Aloïse Buckley Heath is an *NR* tradition.

March 7

Dear Mrs. Heath:

I wish to ask you a great favor. My brother David goes to Cranwell and he says they go easier on brothers, so I might have a chance to get in even though my grades aren't so terribly good. But I need three letters of recommendation and I have one from a priest and one from a nun and my father says he thinks the third one better be from someone who is not a priest or a nun. You are not a priest or a nun but yet you know me intamitely from me having delivered your paper even that bad day right after Christmas when their was no school and the *Times* boy didn't deliver his customers, and from those Catholic Christmas cards you always buy, and from the jack lantern pumpkins I helped you carve three years in a row, and the Easter Eggs, and a lot of other things. (Like the time I picked up John when he broke his arm and taught Priscilla how to ride a two-wheeler.)

Before you say no, I did break the trampoline but I didn't honestly know how heavy I was, because I grew very suddenly and the only reason I was always on the roof was because of my gliders which you said I could get if they were on the roof, and the time you wouldn't let me come in your backyard for three weeks that time, Catholic Word of Honor, John started it and it was not my fault because Scout's Honor, I only gave John the most compleatly gentle kind of tap so he would go home so Georgie Cunningham wouldn't beat him up, because you know how Georgie is when he gets mad. Because John threw a mud ball at him on his bicycle. Not that you were wrong, but that I'm explaning now, because you were so mad then you wouldn't give me a chance to explane, because John got their first and he fed you a lot of garbage. But I still like John, he is a fine young boy, he has been well brought up by his Mother.

But even if sometimes you don't get along with me too well, I always think of you as my "Oldest Friend" so I hope you will do me this great favor of writing me a letter of recommandation.

Thanking you for your trouble,

Respectfully yours,
Peter Bailey-Gates

P.S.: Thank you for the pennies of which I already had the 1926 San Francisco mint but I did not have the 1921 Denver. Do you have a 1905 Indian Head, I will pay one nickel, clear profit of four (4)¢?

Respectfully yours,
Peter Bailey-Gates

March 7

Dear Peter:

I would be glad to write you a letter of recommendation to Cranwell, and I am very flattered that you asked me. Of course, I will have to tell the Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth, so I hope nobody will be careless enough to allow my letter to fall into the hands of the police. I can't tell you how much I would miss you if you had to spend the next ten years in a reformatory.

Respectably yours,
Mrs. H.

P.S.: No, I haven't got a 1905 Indian Head, which saddens me very much, but what saddens me more is the fact that even after three years' acquaintanceship you don't know me well enough to realize that I also know that this particular penny is worth $6! You and your 4¢ profit—hah! I've told you and *told* you about my high IQ. Don't you believe me? However, just to show you I bear no grudge, I will give you my duplicate of the 1911 no mint mark—for free yet!

Respectably yours,
Mrs. H.

P.P.S.: Don't worry about my letter. I will bet you one dollar (from me) to one doughnut (from you) that you will get into

Cranwell—not because you're such a hotshot, you understand, but because if I'm crazy enough to like you, your priest and your nun are probably suffering from the same form of insanity. On the other hand, they may know you even better than I do, God help them!

Respectably yours,
Mrs. H.

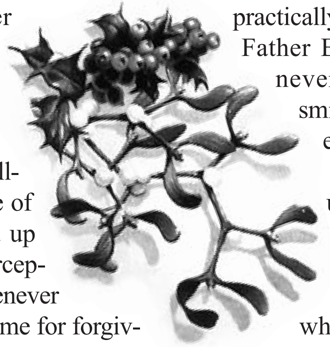
March 9

To Whom It May Concern:

Peter Bailey-Gates has been in and out of my house almost daily for the past three years—by "almost" I mean those short sentences of exile which I have been unkind enough to impose upon Peter—and in that time I have come to know him very well indeed: as friend, paper boy, fellow penny-collector, and combined decorator, waiter, and entertainer at my younger children's birthday parties.

I have found Peter to be unfailingly good-humored, well-mannered, and considerate—all of which qualities stand him in good stead in his relations with the public, which are many and varied. I am sure that no boy in New England, much less in West Hartford, has been engaged in so many intricate business enterprises as Peter Bailey-Gates. I have bought, hired, subscribed to, invested in, paid and been paid interest on fully a dozen of his ventures in the last three years—not even counting his snow-shoveling, leaf-raking, apple-picking, and garbage-can-toting, for which my own young sons are recruited. Peter's financial sense is, however, no deterrent to his feeling for what is fitting and proper: When he washed the car of the 70-year-old spinster who lives nearby, for instance, he was careful to explain (lest I should find out, I suppose!) that he had refused payment only because she had "no man to make money for her"; again, when he asked me to take an ad in his projected *Colony Road News* and I was so irreverent as to reserve two inches of space for the slogan "HOORAY FOR MRS. HEATH," Peter offered to refund my dollar because he had caused my ad to appear as "COMPLIMENTS OF A FRIEND." I must, however, state categorically that Peter has faithfully and conscientiously fulfilled his share of every and any contract between us, whatever it may have been. (And the fact that one or two of these contracts have been rather clearer to Peter than to me has been indignantly attributed by my own children to my habit of doing jigsaw puzzles, reading, watching television programs, and saying "Uh-hunh" simultaneously, when I should have been *listening*. My husband affirms this judgment.)

Lest my young friend sound barely lower than the angels, I must add that his fertile imagination combined with his 13-year-old's sense of humor has led, on occasion, to my addressing him with words harsh and unkind ("You know perfectly well that when I told you last Tuesday you could climb up on the roof to get your glider, I didn't mean you could buy ten *more* gliders and *aim* them at the—and by the way, I hope you didn't buy them with the lottery money for the bicycle horn—when are you going to *have* that lottery, anyway? I bought those tickets six weeks ago!" And much more). These irrational, if predictable, crises of the adult world leave Peter possibly repentant, probably remorseful, but certainly unruffled. He is more sophisticated today than three years ago, when, at the age of ten, he frequently urged me not to get my liver in a quiver. Today, when Peter and I have what he refers to as "a difference of opinion," he retires with complete equanimity to his own backyard until such time as my ill-humor subsides. My change of mood is apparently picked up by Peter's extrasensory perception within the hour, for whenever I decide that the time has come for forgiving and forgetting, he appears at my front door within 15 minutes, to assure me *he* has forgiven and forgotten. By way of proof (or penance?) he then resumes without rancor his status as our daily visitor.



Needless to say, our friendship is steadfast.

Aloïse Buckley Heath
(Mrs. Benjamin Wild Heath)

March 15

Cranwell Preparatory School
Office of the Principal

Mrs. Benjamin Wild Heath
29 Colony Road
West Hartford, Connecticut

Dear Mrs. Heath:

I am very grateful to you for your detailed and colorful description of Peter Bailey-Gates.

Many of Peter's accomplishments can be put to good use at school. Leaf-raking and snow-shoveling are part of the punitive curriculum. Endowed with all the energy which you describe, I am sure that Peter will be an early candidate for demerits.

We will try to keep pace with Peter. What substitute we will have when the occasion arises for Peter to "retire to his own backyard" we will try to figure out during the year.

Sincerely yours,
Charles E. Burke, SJ
(Rev.) Charles E. Burke, SJ
Principal

March 15

Dear Mimi and Dad:

Please excuse the paper, for I'm in study hall, and since something happened tonight, which made me feel pretty proud of my little (little? Ha Ha) brother Peter, I thought I'd tell you about it, unless you already know. This has also changed practically my entire attitude toward Father Burke who has practically never been known to crack a smile in the memory of the oldest graduate.

Not more than five minutes ago, during the break between study-hall hours, Father Burke called me and showed me a letter which Mrs. Heath had written to him about Peter. It described Peter to a tee. All of the letter was praiseworthy about him, and had been written just about Peter and nothing else. Father Burke was astonished and asked me if it was all true, and I told him it was, and he said in that case PETER GETS IN!! . . .

Say hello to the little kids for me please, and tell them "Big Dave" will be home soon.

Love and prayers,
Your son David

March 15

Dear Pete—Boy, does Mrs. Heath sure have your number. Father Burke said he can hardly wait to get you up here to knock it out of you. Love and Kisses.

Dave

COVER STORY VI

Vision, Honor, Action

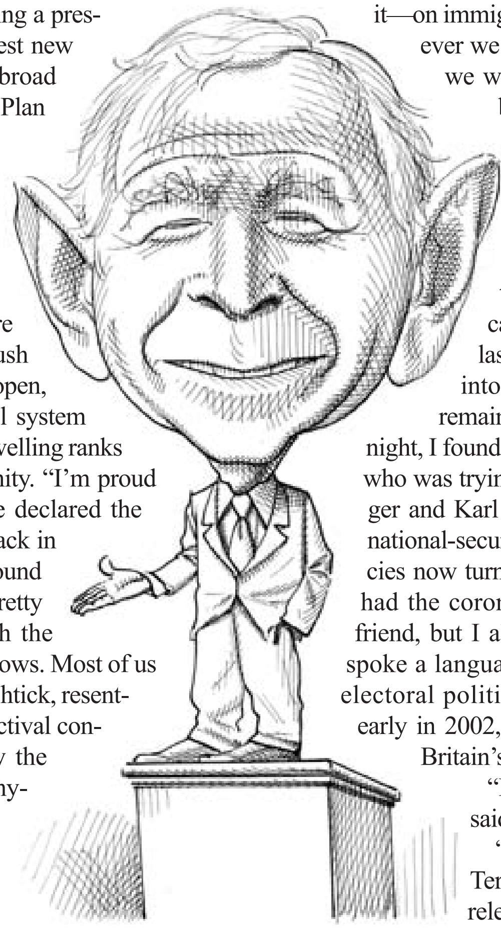
The right man was in the White House on September 11

MARK STEYN

In the course of one of those inevitable "Whither conservatism?" panels two or three National Review cruises ago, I remarked of George W. Bush that it requires a perverse genius to get damned day in day out as the new Hitler when 90 percent of the time you're Tony Blair with a ranch.

I'll stand by that. For good or ill, Bush was the real Third Way deal Bill Clinton merely genuflected towards. The ranch certainly matters—the brush-cutting, the cowboy boots, the swagger, the Texacisms that so grated on East Coast newspaper columnists, the wanted-dead-or-alive rhetoric that had Continental foreign ministers deploring American "simplisme." But underneath the scary tone was a Blairy Tone, a sheep in wolf's clothing. Without the inaugural poison of the Florida recount and 9/11's end to the "end of history," we would now be recalling a presidency distinguished at home by the largest new entitlement since the Great Society and abroad by PEPFAR—the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, mostly to Africa. The latter may or may not be a good thing, and the prescription-drug entitlement certainly isn't. But both would be unlikely priorities for the extreme right-wing madman of Euro-Dem caricature.

Conservatives can't complain they were misled, although many do. Governor Bush campaigned in 2000 as the GOP's first open, out-of-the-closet federalizer of the school system and as a big softie pushover for the ever-swelling ranks of the Undocumented-American community. "I'm proud to be a compassionate conservative," he declared the very first time I saw him on the stump, back in 1999 in New Hampshire. "And on this ground I will make my stand!" It struck me as pretty mushy ground, and by midway through the speech he appeared to be in it up to his elbows. Most of us were suspicious of the "compassionate" schtick, resenting the not-so-implicit rebuke to non-adjectival conservatism. But we were demoralized by the impeachment flop, and watching a touchy-feely sob-sister campaigning in Spanish for increased education spending it seemed reasonable to conclude that the guy couldn't possibly mean it. He was surely indulging in the GOP equivalent of those feints that doctrinaire Democrats feel obliged to make every other November when they suddenly discover they're "personally" opposed to abortion or start scheduling improbable hunting expeditions.


ROMAN GENN

Two months into the new regime, no less an authority than Anthony Lewis of the *New York Times* assured us that "George W. Bush and his people are driven by right-wing ideology to an extent not remotely touched by even the Reagan Administration." In those heady days of spring 2001, it was easy to take Señor Compasión at the Left's estimation of him. Do you remember some of the "controversies" around back then? Arsenic in the water supply? I didn't even know I was in favor of that until Bush started doing it.

But it turned out the compassionate conservative *did* mean it—on immigration, education, and much else. And, whatever we feel about those policies, we cannot say that we were betrayed—for few candidates have ever been so admirably upfront. Indeed, it is a peculiar injustice that the 43rd presidency's most obvious contender for a *Bartlett's* entry should be "Bush lied, people died." The activists who most assiduously promoted the line are now having to adjust to the news that their own beloved "anti-war" candidate's commitment to bring home every last soldier within 16 months has been "revised" into a plan for some 30,000–70,000 troops to remain in Iraq after 2011. On Fox News the other night, I found myself talking to a nice lady from Code Pink who was trying to grapple with the fact that Henry Kissinger and Karl Rove are more enthusiastic about Obama's national-security team than she is. Many other Obama policies now turn out to be inoperative, and we haven't even had the coronation. I don't know about my Code Pink friend, but I already miss Bush's straightforwardness. He spoke a language all but extinct in the upper echelons of electoral politics. "Bush lied"? Here he is in Crawford, early in 2002, being interviewed by Trevor McDonald of Britain's ITN:

"I made up my mind that Saddam needs to go," said Bush.

"And, of course, if the logic of the War on Terror means anything," Sir Trevor responded, relentlessly forensic in his determination not to let Bush get away with these shifty evasions, "then Saddam must go?"

"That's what I just said," said the president. "The policy of my government is that he goes."

"So you're going to go after him?" pressed Sir Trevor, reluctant to take yes for an answer.

"As I told you," said the president, "the policy of my government is that Saddam Hussein not be in power."

Etc. George W. Bush is who he is, and he never pretended to be anything but. Do you know how rare that is? If you don't, you surely will after six months of Barack Obama's enigmatic cool.

A QUESTION OF CHARACTER

There was, of course, one issue on which Bush did not govern as he campaigned. He was against "nation building" in his debates with Al Gore, and then found himself having to do it in two of the most unpromising territories on earth. Had Gore or Kerry or Obama been in office on 9/11, I doubt America would have toppled the Taliban, never mind Saddam. The duck would have been presented as an exercise in sophisticated realpolitik—Afghanistan, graveyard of empire and all that—and there would have been plenty of Security Council meetings and declarations of support from the EU and perhaps even an agreement to move toward the possibility of talks on the implementation of an agreement on the possibility of talks about U.N. sanctions once the relevant resolution had been diluted to Russo-Chinese satisfaction. And no doubt the Pentagon would have lobbed a desultory "$2 million missile at a $10 empty tent and hit a camel in the butt," in Bush's withering characterization of Clintonian retaliation. But the upshot would have been continued Taliban rule in Kabul; Afghanistan as one vast training camp for the world's jihadists; and the general perception that Osama had gotten away with it.

Even in the primal anger of September 2001, there was tremendous institutional resistance to action. Bush had difficulty even naming an enemy without getting instantly undercut. As soon as he denounced the Taliban, Colin Powell said: Au contraire, we're very interested in reaching out to moderate Taliban. So Bush switched to the designation "evildoers" and crossed his fingers that Powell wouldn't go on *Meet the Press* and announce the administration's willingness to reach out to moderate evildoers.

In those critical weeks it was the character of the president—indeed, the characteristics most loathed by his condescending critics (obstinacy, nuance-deficiency)—that determined the downfall of a squalid and malign regime. The jihad picked the wrong guy to catch the eye of. In the broader sense, however, he was right the first time: "Nation building" does not come naturally to America, and, even with the world watching and the full weight of Washington's resources behind it, America is not good at it. I'm not worried about Iraq. Thanks to George W. Bush keeping his head while all about were losing theirs, Iraq will be . . . okay. It won't be Norway or New Hampshire, but it's already the least-worst state in that part of the world. Yet that was never the issue. If you live in Tikrit or Ramadi, the Iraq War was about Iraq. If you live in Moscow or Beijing or Riyadh, Tehran, Pyongyang or Paris, the Iraq War was always about America—about American will, American credibility—and, on that score, there remains a question mark.

As we neo-imperialists quickly learned, there are simply no takers for imperialism in America. This isn't merely a leftish revulsion. Many on the right also quickly detached themselves from the Bush Doctrine. George Will pointed out that there was no Madison or Hamilton in Iraq. True. But you could say the same for Canada. If the caliber of Madison is a necessary condition for liberty, then almost everywhere on the planet would still be in chains. Had the British waited for an Indian Madison or Hamilton to show up, then the subcontinent would look much like the Middle East does now—a toxic patchwork of decadent sultanates and psychotic dictatorships. But they didn't wait: They got to work. Sometimes the tough assignments fall on your watch. That was the challenge Bush accepted after 9/11.

To his British hosts at Whitehall Palace in London in 2003, he put it this way: "We must shake off decades of failed policy in the Middle East. Your nation and mine, in the past, have been willing to make a bargain, to tolerate oppression for the sake of stability. . . . Yet this bargain did not bring stability or make us safe. It merely bought time, while problems festered and ideologies of violence took hold. . . . No longer should we think tyranny is benign because it is temporarily convenient. Tyranny is never benign to its victims, and our great democracies should oppose tyranny wherever it is found."

There is both realpolitik and idealpolitik in there. The West's unreal "realism" in the Middle East brought us the House of Saud, the Baathists, Arafat, the ayatollahs . . . and ultimately al-Qaeda, 9/11, and Wahhabi subversion around the planet. There's nothing more pitiful than naïve cynicism: To the old CIA line that he may be a sonofabitch but he's our sonofabitch, the best response is that he may be our sonofabitch but in the end he's a sonofabitch, as we should have learned by now in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt, and elsewhere.

WORDS MATTER

To repudiate half a century of American policy in the Middle East is easier said than done. Whether or not the Bush Doctrine would work in Araby, by the second term it was clear it wasn't working in Washington. Transferred to State, Condi Rice defaulted to Scowcroftian unrealism, and the president himself, while he talked about staying on offense, gave the impression that his eponymous doctrine had been put at the back of the icebox and that the war (as fewer Americans were inclined to see it) had dwindled down into a couple of messy, defensive, thankless, semi-colonial policing operations. The "war on terror" concept will die with his administration: Neither Barack Obama nor the European leaders he finds congenial think it a useful model. But in Iraq, where Saddam's goons shoveled children into mass graves, and in Afghanistan, where women were prevented by law from feeling sunlight on their faces, 50 million Muslims live better lives because of George W. Bush.

On that and many other issues, history will almost certainly make the case for Bush better than Bush himself did. At almost every critical moment, the administration appeared to take the view that, as it was self-evidently walking the walk, it had no need to talk the talk. Words matter: Churchill wasn't just down in the ops room sticking pins in maps but all over the airwaves explaining why the Nazis needed to be wiped from the earth. Lose the rhetorical ground at home and you'll lose the war overseas—either literally, as in Vietnam, or perception-wise, as in Iraq, where victory has been secured but past the point where Bush will get any credit for it this side of the history books.

It wasn't just that the president and his great cause eventually came to be all but entirely defined by their opponents. The more critical failure occurred much earlier. It is already the dreariest of tropes in this transition period to compare President-elect Obama to Franklin Roosevelt: FDR had the Depression, BHO has the, er, collapse of Lehman Bros, etc. But the real FDR moment—the seismic event that a canny politician seizes as a pretext for transformative change—was surely 9/11. A few weeks after the attacks, Bush had the highest approval ratings of any president in history. But he didn't do anything with them. And the greatest mistake of all was his disinclination to take on the broader culture that, in the wake of 9/11, looked briefly vulnerable—in that moment when Americans opted for "Let's roll!" over the desiccated Oprahfied chants of "healing" and "closure" and the rest of the awful lifeless language of emotional narcissism.

Bush had a rare opportunity to reverse the most poisonous tide in the Western world: He could have argued that Western self-loathing is a psychosis we can no longer afford. He could have told the teachers' unions there was more to the Second World War than the internment of Japanese Americans and it's time they started mentioning it to our children. You can't hold the 90 percent approval ratings forever, but, while he had them, George W. Bush could have used them for a "teaching moment": If ever there's a time for not being mired in civilizational self-abasement, wartime is it. Yet the president figured he could fight a long existential struggle against America's enemies in a culture that teaches its children there are no enemies, just friends whose grievances we haven't yet accommodated.

So, by the 2004 campaign season, he was the 50 percent president again, relying on a get-out-the-vote operation in selected corners of purpling red states to put him over the top against a weak, tone-deaf, elitist buffoon who voted for the war before he voted against it. It shouldn't have been like that. By the time he rolled the dice on one last surge in Iraq, George W. Bush had been abandoned by the controlling party in Congress, half his own party, and the overwhelming majority of the citizenry for whom the war had become a downer reality show they were bored with. Yet he understood, as few others did, that America could not be seen to lose in Iraq without being exposed as a sham superpower in Iran, China, Russia, Belgium, and everywhere else: and through sheer force of will he stuck it out.

The Bush presidency is already history, at least in that most contemptuous of American putdowns: "Aw, he's history. Fuhgeddabouttim." The cadences of the era are obsolete: so fuhgeddabout "9/11." "Let's roll." "Axis of evil." "WMD." The past is another country, and its language is a Berlitz phrasebook to a place most Americans long ago lost the urge to visit. But in years to come they'll appreciate that, in a world of finger-in-the-windy trimmers and poseurs, George W. Bush was the right man in office that day, as his predecessor and successor would not have been. He rose to the occasion, and he did so with a farsightedness that belies his bumper-sticker image. I doubt even with his feet up back at the ranch he reads a lot of 17th-century French poets, but Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux put it well: "Honor is like an island, rugged and without a beach; once we have left it, we can never return." It was an ever bleaker and lonelier island, but George W. Bush never left it. **NR**

■ COVER STORY VII

Missed Opportunities

On domestic policy, Bush's record is mixed

RAMESH PONNURU

When George W. Bush became president, the Right was in a precarious position. Both conservatives' failures and their successes were conspiring against their future.

Six years previously Republicans, led by Newt Gingrich, had taken control of Congress and embarked on a program to eliminate Cabinet departments and rein in entitlement spending. That program failed: The public sided with Bill Clinton on such matters as Medicare funding. On the other hand a largely Republican-designed welfare reform was enacted. This achievement, however, blunted Republican attacks on big government. Once federal activism was no longer seen as subverting middle-class values, it rose in popularity.

Bush adapted to the post-Clinton political environment. Running in 2000, he made no specific pledges to cut spending but did promise to make Medicare pay for senior citizens' medications for the first time. On some days Bush seemed to promise more continuity with Clinton than Bush's rival, Al Gore, Clinton's vice president, who had decided to run as an angry populist. These tactics enabled Bush to win even though the country was at peace and at the tail end of a boom. But he barely won, in circumstances that made him illegitimate in his opponents' minds. Republicans actually lost seats in the Senate.

In his early months Bush won a few legislative victories, the most important being the passage of his tax cuts. But many observers felt he was running out of steam by the middle of his first year. Bush did nothing to dispel that impression by announcing, around that time, a new "communities of character" initiative that, among other things, proposed to help the elderly learn how to e-mail their grandchildren.

September 11 then thrust Bush into the stratosphere of public approval ratings while raising the salience of the national-security issues that had benefited his party since the late 1960s. Fear of terrorists propelled Republicans to victories in 2002 and 2004. Republicans controlled both houses of Congress and the White House—a degree of power they had not possessed since the 1920s. Some Republicans, and not only Republicans, began to think that the party had built a durable majority.

The point of reviewing this familiar history is to suggest three things about Bush's domestic-policy legacy. First, that Republicans were overconfident in the middle of the decade. The aftermath of Sept. 11 obscured but did not erase the party's weakness on domestic policy. Second, that Bush's record should not be judged on the basis of that overconfidence. It should not be assumed either that Republicans would have had a lasting majority but for Bush's incompetence or that he could have governed in a manner much more pleasing to limited-government conservatives if only he had so chosen. And third, that the elections of 2000, 2002, and 2004 nonetheless gave Bush and his party an opportunity to reverse the country's liberalizing trends. They failed.

Perhaps out of conscious design, Bush's domestic policies largely fit with a strategy to expand the center-Right coalition. The first component of that strategy was to co-opt public sentiment for government activism, as with the prescription-drug plan. The second was, where possible, to push in roundabout ways to limit government. Bush sought, most notably, to build an "ownership society" in which people would be able to provide for their own needs and thus turn less frequently to government. Third, Bush delivered on social conservatives' top priorities. Fourth, he attempted to reach out to blacks and Hispanics. Some of these components were in obvious tension, but others reinforced each other: Both Bush's social conservatism and his willingness to spend federal money were considered useful in expanding the party's share of the minority vote.

THE RESULTS

Tax cuts were the most significant of Bush's conservative domestic achievements. He cut income-tax rates for the first time since 1986. He also cut taxes on capital gains, dividends, and estates, and expanded the child tax credit. These tax cuts largely followed the supply-side command to increase incentives to work, save, and invest, and they probably marginally increased economic growth. Bush's tax cuts differed from Reagan's in one key respect: They were explicitly temporary. Because Bush's tax cuts were not accompanied by much in the way of spending restraint, however, they are very likely to prove temporary in practice as well. (Bush's unwillingness or inability to be a budget-cutter got expensive, most shamefully in the case of farm subsidies, where he presided over the demise of a bipartisan free-market reform introduced under his predecessor.)

At least some of Bush's tax cuts will endure. Most Democrats say that they will keep those tax cuts that offer direct benefits for the middle class, such as the enlarged child credit. President-elect Obama has suggested that he does not want capital-gains and dividend taxes to leap all the way back to their pre-Bush levels. Even if the tax level rises, then, the tax structure will have been improved: Taxes will fall less heavily on investments (including investments in the next generation) and more on consumption.

Social Security reform was supposed to be to Bush's second term what tax cuts were to his first: an early and big conservative victory. It was a more ambitious goal, involving as it did an extremely popular New Deal program. Bush proposed to allow young workers to invest some of their Social Security funds for themselves while reducing the growth of benefits for the affluent. He viewed this proposal as a way to help people of modest means acquire financial assets and thus join the ownership society. Many conservatives hoped that the effect would be to make voters more favorably inclined to free markets.

Had Bush prevailed, his record on many issues would look very different. The cuts in future spending contemplated in his plan amounted to $10 trillion in present-value terms—easily dwarfing most of the spending increases that conservatives hold against him. Republicans would have gone into the 2006 election with a huge, if controversial, accomplishment.

But Democrats had no reason to cooperate with Bush. Even in conservative states, voters were not demanding reform, and left-wing groups were promising retribution against any Democrat who stepped out of line. Without some Democratic support, reform could not get the 60 votes in the Senate required to clear a filibuster. And if reform was not going to pass, congressional Republicans were not going to go out on a limb for it. Bush's cherished plan died a slow death without ever coming to a vote.

Bush was able to make major changes to one entitlement: Medicare, which he expanded. Prescription drugs play a much bigger role in medicine now than they did when the program for the medical care of the elderly was founded in 1965. That Medicare covered most surgeries but not most medications was an anomaly that was bound to end. Paying for prescription drugs was very popular, including among voters who considered themselves conservative. But it was also very expensive. Medicare's trustees say that the drug program faces an $8 trillion shortfall over the next 75 years.

The Bush administration initially wanted to couple the benefit expansion with a market-oriented reform of the program. But the Republican Speaker of the House, Denny Hastert, told the press that the congressional party had no stomach for such reform. Bush settled for expanding the role of competing private-sector companies in delivering benefits. This innovation worked well enough that conservatives have talked about it as a model for a larger Medicare reform. But Democrats are hostile to this policy, and they appear to have the votes to cripple it.

Republicans were able to attach another conservative idea to the Medicare bill: health savings accounts. Americans can now buy high-deductible health-insurance policies and use a tax-free savings account to pay for expenses below the deductible. The hope was that as more Americans paid for routine care out of pocket, a true marketplace would emerge, with more competition and lower prices. The accounts were thus another end-run around the welfare state. More than 6 million Americans now hold such policies.

The Bush years also, however, saw the growth of public provision of health insurance. To some extent this was the result of the continued unraveling of the corporate welfare state for employees that the federal government has long subsidized. Companies stopped offering health insurance, and people went on Medicaid. The Bush administration aided the trend by granting waivers to states to let them enroll more people in their programs. It did so in the name of federalism, but a peculiar kind in which the feds ended up picking up much of the bill. The future may yield a different verdict, but right now it looks as though the Bush administration was at best a net wash for health-care freedom.

The verdict is out, as well, on Bush's education policy. Defenders of his attempt to reform K–12 schooling from Washington say that he instituted a testing regime that has generated a wealth of new information that will, in turn, be useful in spurring future reforms. With test scores flat, Bush's policies will be vindicated only if those future reforms ever materialize.

BUSH AND THE SOCIAL ISSUES

President Bush did nearly everything that pro-lifers could reasonably ask of him. He signed a number of pro-life bills, such as a ban on partial-birth abortion and a law recognizing two victims in federal crimes against pregnant women. He tightened policies against federal funding for abortion. He appointed two Supreme Court justices who are considered likely to vote to overrule *Roe* if given the chance. And he spoke repeatedly about his desire to see America build a "culture of life." On his watch, both the abortion rate and public support for abortion continued slowly to decline.

Federal funding for stem-cell research became a hot issue at the beginning of the Bush administration. Bush again sided with pro-lifers, refusing to offer funding that might encourage the destruction of human embryos. He withstood very strong political pressures in sticking to this stand: Some members of his party and even of his Cabinet disagreed with him, and Bush cast his first veto on the issue.

By blocking federal funding for embryo-destructive research while encouraging other types of stem-cell research, Bush bought time for the science to develop along less objectionable lines. During his second term it became increasingly clear that stem-cell research could proceed fruitfully without destroying human embryos. Obama will allow federal funding of embryo-destructive research, but that research does not dominate the scientific agenda the way it did in 2001. Federal funding for research involving the production and destruction of embryos through cloning, meanwhile, is off the table. It probably would have occurred if Gore or John Kerry had been elected.

The president's attempts to modify immigration policy were a fiasco. He made the issue of illegal immigration very prominent, first by presiding over a large influx of illegal immigrants and failing to enforce the law, then by pushing a "comprehensive reform" that provided legal status to most illegal immigrants. The ill-considered plan elicited little support from the public and fury from most conservatives, and it failed. Conservatives were left alienated from Bush, and Hispanics alienated from the Republican party.

Hurricane Katrina, meanwhile, washed away the modest but real progress Bush had made with black voters. Working-class blacks, Hispanics, and whites alike were at the same time growing frustrated at the stagnant wages and rising cost of living that characterized what some conservatives called the "Bush boom."

Overall the Bush administration fell far short of its stated ambitions. The causes of these disappointments included the persistent mediocrity of many of Bush's appointees and the administration's top-to-bottom reluctance to engage its critics and attempt to move public opinion. But before Republicans conclude that Bush led their party astray, it is worth remembering that at many key moments the congressional party was more short-sighted and less conservative than he was: on entitlements, on spending, and on ethics, for example.

To return to power, Republicans will of course have to learn from Bush's many mistakes. But it is very likely that the next Republican president will share some crucial traits with Bush. He will be socially conservative. He will reach out to minorities. He will seek—more successfully, let's hope, than Bush—to reform and restrain the welfare state, but will not try to shrink it dramatically. Bush's successor will adopt this approach for the same reason Bush did: There is no alternative. **NR**

■ **COVER STORY VIII**

Lincoln, Churchill, Bush?

Of the president's strengths and weaknesses as supreme commander

THOMAS DONNELLY

During his August vacation at his Texas ranch in 2002, George W. Bush was said to be spending the hours not spent cutting brush immersed in Eliot A. Cohen's *Supreme Command*. The book presents an argument about the proper course of civil-military relations together with four case studies of the masters of wartime leadership: Lincoln, Churchill, Clemenceau, and Ben-Gurion. Whatever wisdom the president may have extracted from his studies, the effort suggests that, during the summer before the invasion of Iraq, he intuited the challenges he would face and set a high standard for meeting them.

Perhaps even this never-look-back man would acknowledge that he has fallen short of the bar he seemed to set. But a summary judgment of George W. Bush as supreme commander is less informative than an examination of the reasons things didn't work out as planned. It is too early to undertake a thorough assessment of Bush's performance, but perhaps we can begin to distinguish the troubles of the man from the troubles of his times.

BEFORE 9/11

The first step away from the heat and toward the light is to recover some sense of the context surrounding the events of the Bush years. The attacks of September 11, 2001, may not have "changed everything," but they surely called into question the conventional wisdom about international relations. Bush's presidential candidacy was very much a product of the 1990s zeitgeist. Conservatives have never been able to get the hang of post-historical "flat world" rhetoric, but Bush's "Vulcans"—the foreign-policy advisory team he assembled for his 2000 run—did believe that the collapse of the Soviet Union had resulted in a "strategic pause," possibly lasting several decades. Perceiving international politics as a great-power struggle, Bush's inner circle focused on the rivalry with China. During the 2000 campaign, Candidate Bush spoke of China as a "strategic competitor"—distancing himself from the Clinton administration's policy of promoting a "strategic partnership" with Beijing—and described a transformation of U.S. military forces that would exploit technology to discourage the People's Liberation Army

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from accelerating an arms race it could not hope to win.

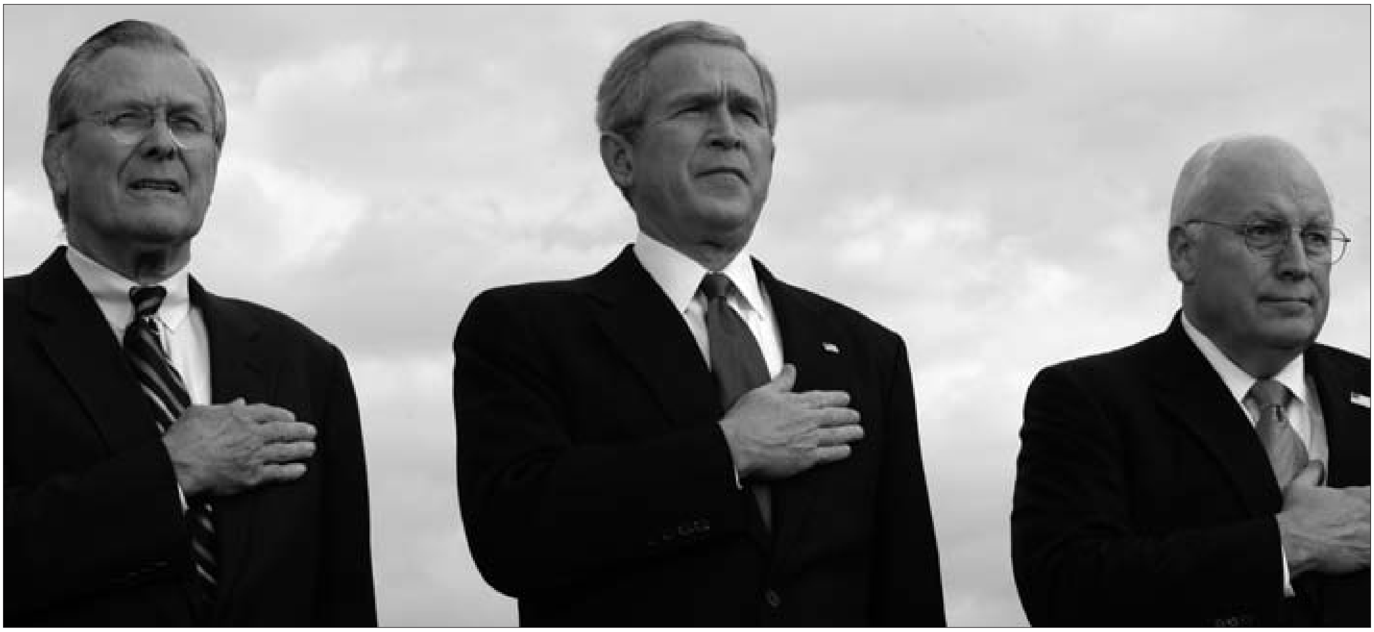
The new administration's first test came in April 2001, when a Chinese fighter collided with a U.S. EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft. The Chinese MiG crashed, and the Navy surveillance plane was forced to land on Hainan Island, where it and its crew were seized, provoking a hostage standoff that caught Bush and his lieutenants flat-footed. The bellicose rhetoric coming out of Beijing did not follow the script: The Chinese seemed ready for confrontation immediately, not in the distant future, and what transpired was not a coldly calculated long-term strategic competition but an immediate crisis. The episode uncovered rifts in the senior Bush team. Neither Bush nor national security adviser Condoleezza Rice was able to fashion a decisive policy. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld agitated for a muscular response, but in the end Bush turned to Secretary of State Colin Powell to resolve the problem diplomatically. Bush acted as the "decider," choosing rather than leading.

For his part, Rumsfeld embraced the project of defense transformation as his top job. From the moment he assumed office, he plainly meant to reform an entrenched military bureaucracy resistant to change. He regarded the Army as the epitome of Cold War irrelevance and planned to reduce its numbers by 15 to 20 percent. His defense transformation was to take the form of a corporate restructuring of the Pentagon, substituting capital for labor and divesting the military of outmoded missions. Portending troubles to come, Rumsfeld seemed to consider this transformation to be the military's main mission, rather than a means to military ends.

TOPPLING THE TALIBAN

George Bush saw that the 9/11 attacks were acts of war. "Global War on Terror" is now so much a part of our vocabulary that we forget how long it took to recognize that we were at war. Despite the Khobar Towers bombing, the attacks on American embassies in East Africa and the USS *Cole*, and the repeated war declarations of Osama bin Laden, the Clinton administration was paralyzed in its response, first treating terrorism as a job for law enforcement, then responding with irresolute military action. We now see jihadi groups through Bush's eyes: as ruthless and implacable enemies.

We "struck" into Afghanistan—even today our action is seldom described as an invasion. To a significant degree, this reflects Rumsfeld's continuing influence. The image of special-operations forces on horseback, calling in satellite-guided bombs, remains seductive. And, to be sure, the initial invasion succeeded beyond the imagining of even the transformation enthusiasts. U.S. forces deployed rapidly to the far side of the world, fought a creative campaign, and toppled the Taliban in weeks. The president's popularity soared, and the bitter partisan divisions of the 2000 election were submerged, for a time, as Democrats rallied behind the victorious commander-in-chief. The crusty defense secretary became the far-seeing prophet of a new way of war. Americans were overwhelmingly prepared to follow where Bush might lead.



MATTHEW CAVANAUGH/UPI

The conventional wisdom is that, at this fraught moment, Bush, Dick Cheney, and their shadowy neoconservative cabal turned away from the real enemy and indulged their obsession with Iraq. But the truth is that once the Taliban had dispersed and al-Qaeda's leadership had fled to Pakistan, it was far from clear what the next step ought to be. The invasion removed any immediate prospect that Afghanistan would again become the large-scale base for al-Qaeda that it had been in 2001. By early 2002, Bush had good reason to conclude that the war in Afghanistan, at least as he and his advisers understood it, had been won.

INTO IRAQ

The most lasting effect of Bush's presidency probably will be his reframing of American strategy in the Islamic world. At some point in 2002, the Global War on Terror evolved into the Long War, at once a larger and a more specific project: the long-term political transformation of the greater Middle East, particularly its Arab heartland. To take this on was an audacious decision, and it is not clear how that decision was made or how rigorous the internal administration debate was. The most unfortunate result of the fixation on the question of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction was

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to obscure this larger and, it is now clear, more consequential objective.

The 9/11 attacks made it incontestable that the traditional U.S. strategy in the Middle East, built upon devil's bargains with oil princes, autocrats, and tyrants, was a shambles. To paraphrase the president, the United States had subordinated the cause of liberty in pursuit of stability but had realized neither. Bush began the attempt at regime change with the march to Baghdad, but his larger goal lay beyond. It is uncertain whether that greater object will be achieved, but the prospects appear far brighter now than they did in 2006. Whether progress since then outweighs the failures that immediately followed the invasion is an even more uncertain calculation. The errors in the conduct of the Iraq War already have filled many books, but the great puzzle of the Bush presidency remains the president's combination of penetrating strategic insight with reprehensible sloth in managing his lieutenants and generals. The failures of Rumsfeld and the rest amount to gross negligence, but ultimate responsibility rests with Bush.

Yet thanks to Bush's much-disparaged stubbornness, and his implementation of the "surge" strategy, success in Iraq now is within reach. The situation in Baghdad remains fragile, but the real measure of the surge is not tactical. It was not so much about adding troops, employing traditional anti-insurgency strategies, the Sunni Awakening, the Sadr ceasefire, or Nouri al-Maliki's ambition, as about whether the United States would stick it out in Iraq. Bush refused to accept defeat, so the project of regime change continues, at least for now. The Obama years may be a time of consolidation rather than new ambition, but the new president will find it difficult to undo what Bush has done, either in Iraq or in the wider region. But Bush has left it to his successors to develop a viable strategy for reshaping the Middle East. The Bush Doctrine is a vision, not a set of priorities, let alone a how-to plan.

BEYOND IRAQ

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan should not be the only benchmarks of George W. Bush's tenure as supreme strategist and commander-in-chief. But the pattern of mixed results is apparent in other measures of his performance.

Candidate Bush promised to preserve America's global preeminence. The chattering classes have declared the "end of unipolarity" or the "sorrows of empire" for the better part of a decade. With the onset of the financial crisis and global economic troubles, they're belting out the chorus of American decline with renewed enthusiasm. Bush has not solved the puzzle of China's rise as a great power; his combination of engagement and hedging is essentially a continuation of Clinton's policy. The administration's biggest great-power success is the developing partnership with India, but balancing that is the failure to foresee or respond to Russia's revanchist polices under Vladimir Putin. The peace of Europe, taken for granted since the end of the Cold War, is once again in question. As a practitioner of grand strategy, Bush has been mediocre at best. The impulse to delegate rather than to lead has been dominant, with the result that problems—North Korea and Iran, to name two—fester.

Bush has also been an uncertain steward of the armed forces. As a vice-presidential candidate, Dick Cheney promised the armed forces that "help is on the way." In fact, the Bush administration has failed to fix the underlying gap between America's strategic ends and its military means. In the aftermath of 9/11, the president might easily have reversed the policy of transformation-on-the-cheap—even in the face of bitter anger over the Iraq War, Democratic Congresses have granted Bush every penny requested for defense—but he has been content, per Secretary Rumsfeld, to go to war with the force we have rather than the force we would like to have, or the force we need.

When he announced the Iraq surge, Bush also agreed to an increase in the size of the Army and Marine Corps. The good news is that the growth has happened much faster than expected—the active Army will reach its goal of 547,000 before Bush leaves office—but that bad news is that this is only an 8 percent increase in troop strength. The active Army and Marine Corps, currently employing about 750,000 troops, probably should grow to a combined strength of 1 million over the next decade. The American military is hardly broken; its performance under the stresses of prolonged counterinsurgency campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan is astonishing. But it needs help.

TOO EARLY TO JUDGE

In the 1960s, Chinese premier Zhou Enlai was asked about the consequences of the French Revolution. His answer: "It's too early to tell." At this early date, we ought to be allowed some circumspection in judging President Bush. The final tally depends on the late returns from Baghdad.

As with classical tragic heroes, Bush's greatest failures were born from his greatest successes: The rapid and supposedly decisive invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan proved to be merely the opening acts of protracted, irregular conflicts and subordinate campaigns in a sprawling Long War. It is a further irony that any rehabilitation of Bush's reputation will be rooted in his alleged "state of denial"—which is to say, his unwillingness to accept a defeat that the Washington smart set had ordained. And it may fall to Barack Obama to legitimate the central insight of the Bush Doctrine, which, at least in the greater Middle East, is born of clarity about American interests and a commitment to liberal principles.

It is worth remembering that prolonged and inconclusive small wars tend to destroy rather than create reputations. Would Lincoln really have managed Reconstruction as well as he did the Civil War? Grant could not. Lyndon Johnson's presidency was lost in Vietnam. The Philippine insurrection made the Spanish–American War less splendid, and eventually took a good deal of the shine off of Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Rider image. It is nearly impossible to emerge as a decisive wartime leader when the conflict at hand is indecisive.

George W. Bush's best argument for a place in the company of history's supreme commanders comes from the constancy of his commitment. Starting in 2006—which is to say, in the nick of time—the president began to see his wars with fewer illusions, and turned what had been mere stubbornness into moral courage of the sort that can make a real difference in the world. The 2008 presidential campaign proceeded from the presumption that leadership in wartime demands experience. But it was Napoleon who understood why 3 A.M. is such a critical hour: He spoke of "two-in-the-morning courage." That has been George Bush's singular quality. We will see whether his successors have equal perseverance. They will need it. **NR**

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Fri/July 10	Dubrovnik, Croatia	8AM-6PM	late-night smoker
Sat/July 11	Corfu, Greece	8AM-6PM	
Sun/July 12	Katakolon, Greece	7AM-2PM	afternoon seminar evening cocktail reception
Mon/July 13	Santorini, Greece	8AM-9PM	
Tue/July 14	Ephesus, Turkey	7AM-7PM	"night owl" session
Wed/July 15	Piraeus, Greece	8AM-6PM	"night owl" session
Thur/July 16	AT SEA		morning, afternoon seminars late-night smoker
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■ COVER STORY IX

The Myth of Bush's Torture Regime

Dissecting the anatomy of a smear

ANDREW C. McCARTHY

THE question was whether terrorists should get the privileges the Geneva Conventions grant to honorable combatants. The answer was firm: "We must not, and need not, give recognition and protection to terrorist groups as a price for progress in humanitarian law."

These are the words not of George W. Bush but of the *Washington Post*. The editors were approvingly quoting Pres. Ronald Reagan, in a 1987 editorial supporting Reagan's refusal to sign "Protocol I," an addendum to Geneva that extended to terrorists the Conventions' ban on the compulsory interrogation of lawful combatants. The *New York Times*, too, recoiled at the thought of "giving terrorists the status of POWs."

What a difference two decades of journalistic rot make. For the last seven years of war against terrorists, the antiwar Left, using the megaphone of a compliant press, has woven a Bush "torture narrative." As related in the book *War by Other Means*, by former Justice Department official John Yoo, author of the 2002 DOJ guidance commonly libeled as "the torture memo," it goes like this: "The Bush administration used torture to extract information from al-Qaeda leaders, and decided to use the same methods on the detainees at Guantanamo Bay, whom it deprived of Geneva Conventions protections for precisely this purpose. Harsh interrogation methods became part of military culture and 'migrated' to Iraq, where they produced the horrible abuses at Abu Ghraib." The tale is a mountain of politicized lies built on kernels of intentional legal ambiguity.

THE RULES OF CIVILIZED WAR

We begin with a brute fact: The barbarism of international terrorism defies the existing system of multilateral treaties and domestic statutes that guide the treatment of captives. In the case of the treaties, this *must* be so: The animating idea of the Geneva Conventions, adopted in 1949 after the carnage of two world wars, was to civilize warfare. Belligerents opted into the system by conduct. The benefits accorded to lawful combatants (i.e., honorable POWs) included an absolute prohibition against any penalties for resisting interrogation—hence the familiar phrase, only "name, rank, and serial number." But warriors had to earn these benefits by heeding the laws of war: Be part of a regular army, wear uniforms, carry weapons openly, and, most essentially, refrain from endangering civilians.

The Conventions, moreover, were traditional treaties. Geneva benefited neither states that declined to join nor factions ineligible to join because they were not states. And because the parties who did join were sovereign governments, Geneva was to be policed diplomatically; it vested no rights in individual citizens, much less rights enforceable in the judicial courts of member countries.

Global jihadist networks turn such a system on its head. Their modus operandi is to endanger civilians, directly by mass-destruction attacks and indirectly by blending into the population, complicating reprisals. Plus, as non-state actors they are not burdened by obligations that make sovereigns vulnerable: Territorial conquest and economic sanctions are not viable strategies for quelling them.

Two elementary facts follow. First, terrorists cannot opt into Geneva. They fall outside because, by definition, they reject its minimum humanitarian requirements. Affording them Geneva's benefits rewards their savagery and undermines the system's civilizing objectives.

Second, intelligence-gathering is imperative in this war as in no other. Because terror cells defy standard military and diplomatic countermeasures, they can be thwarted only by *information*: identifying their operatives, hideouts, motivations, targets, and methods. Unless covert agents infiltrate the inner sanctums of terror networks (which is extraordinarily difficult to do), the best source of such intelligence is the interrogation of captured terrorists. Applying the steep Geneva interrogation restrictions reserved for honorable combatants would be suicidal: Life-saving intelligence would be lost and no reciprocal benefit achieved for captured Americans, whom terrorists would torture and kill in any event.

This is the true context of the Bush administration's military response to 9/11. The October 2001 invasion of Afghanistan quickly resulted in many terrorist captures. In February 2002, President Bush determined that al-Qaeda fell entirely outside Geneva. As the de facto government of Afghanistan, the Taliban was within the treaties' general protections; but Taliban fighters did not qualify for POW status because they rampantly violated the laws of war. Still, regardless of status, President Bush ordered that all detainees be treated "humanely and, to the extent appropriate and consistent with military necessity, in a manner consistent with the principles of Geneva." These proper directives—more solicitude than our enemies were entitled to—provided wide latitude for intelligence gathering. Existing law forbade torture but permitted subjecting unlawful combatants to aggressive interrogation methods short of torture.

As is now well known, the CIA was authorized to conduct a special interrogation program for high-level Qaeda detainees. It allowed for waterboarding, a form of simulated drowning. But use of that tactic was apparently limited to a grand total of three detainees (including Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, al-Qaeda's chief operational planner), and it hasn't been employed in about five years.

At the Defense Department, in December 2002, Secretary Donald Rumsfeld authorized tactics that ramped up interrogation in two stages: Category I included common police methods like yelling and deception; Category II permitted such tactics as isolation, sleep deprivation, clothing removal (not conceived as compelled nudity but as detachment from comfort items), forced grooming, diet alteration (from hot meals to military field rations), exploitation of phobias (such as the presence, but not threatening use, of dogs), and stress positions (such as standing for four hours).

Also proposed was a Category III menu that would require commander approval. Rumsfeld, however, assented to only one of its measures: mild, non-injurious physical contact (grabbing, poking, or light pushing). He declined to authorize waterboarding, scenarios creating a fear of imminent death or pain, and exposure to cold weather or water.

Like the president, Rumsfeld was emphatic that all interrogation be humane. Furthermore, when Defense Department lawyers protested—instinctively fearing that enhanced tactics would imperil captured U.S. personnel—Rumsfeld quickly rescinded all the harsh techniques and ordered a more detailed study. In April 2003, revised guidance suggested 26 general techniques, only two (blindfolding and light, non-injurious touching) involving any physical contact. Also proposed were nine "exceptional" methods, mostly tactics listed in Category II of the original 2002 guidance. Rumsfeld, however, rejected the two general tactics calling for physical touching, and of the exceptional tactics approved only one: isolation, limited to 30 days. That's it. As Yoo recounts, no dogs, touching, slaps, sleep deprivation, stress positions, or forced calisthenics.

The blunt truth is that none of the administration-approved tactics constituted torture. In actuality, these security measures are commonsense matters of life and death, and we need to let our laws about them be guided by common sense.

PARTISAN MYTH-MAKING

The creators of the torture narrative refuse to take this view. When the Abu Ghraib scandal broke in spring 2004, human-rights activists, international-law professors, and opportunistic politicians bludgeoned Americans with an indictment of their government as a torture regime. It counted for nothing that it was the military itself that first disclosed the abuse, that Bush had ordered full Geneva protections for Iraqis, that the miscreant soldiers were prosecuted, and that a bipartisan panel rejected the absurd claim that Bush had installed a prisoner-abuse program. (The same panel recounted that less than one-tenth of one percent of 50,000 detainees in the War on Terror had viable abuse claims—extraordinarily low by historical warfare standards.)

Was the Bush administration a terror regime? Americans rejected this slander in November 2004. But the Left continues assiduously to blur the lines between torture, lesser forms of abuse, and the routine pressure and anxiety that are hallmarks of any effective interrogation.

Our law reserves the designation *torture* for what a federal appeals court has described as practices causing "intense, lasting, and heinous agony"—acts so abominable they stand apart from other condemnable forms of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment (CID). By contrast, the human-rights activists behind the U.N. Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT) confounded these distinctions, barring torture and CID as if they were the same thing. The U.S. rejected this conflation.

When UNCAT was ratified in 1994, the U.S. accepted its torture proscriptions in full. Congress duly enacted laws that criminalized torture, narrowly defining it as physical or prolonged mental abuse that was severe. But the CID provisions were not accepted: They were impossibly vague, with terms like *degrading* treatment portending frivolous abuse claims. So treaty reservations were adopted, reducing CID to nothing more than conduct that was already illegal under U.S. law.

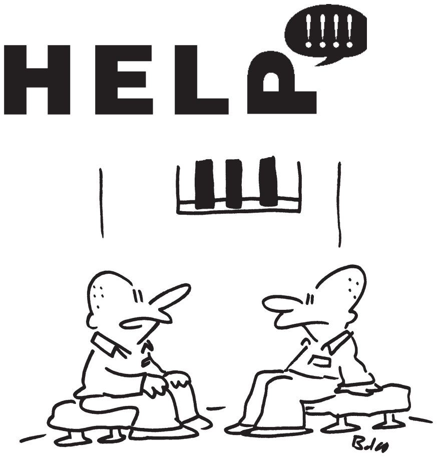
The U.S. was remaining true to Geneva's principles—but the terrorist onslaught, marinated in Bush Derangement Syndrome, intoxicated the leftists into betraying those principles. The Left now insists that no one, not even terrorists bent on killing as many Americans as possible, can be confined to a "legal black hole." If Geneva's civilizing standards excluded the barbarities of jihadism, the fault had to lie with the standards, not the barbarities. And since progressives view existing law as organic and endlessly pliable, *voilà!*—international prisoner-treatment standards could instantly be morphed into a terror-friendly chimera.

Thus did Democrats and John McCain grandstand shamefully over Abu Ghraib. Thus did the same opportunists blithely portray waterboarding as torture even though Congress, despite many opportunities, declined to make it illegal. And thus did a sharply divided Supreme Court, in the 2006 *Hamdan* case, have to abuse the language of Geneva's Common Article 3 (CA3)—which by its own terms applies only to civil wars—in order to extend its vague guarantees of humane treatment to the international conflict with al-Qaeda.

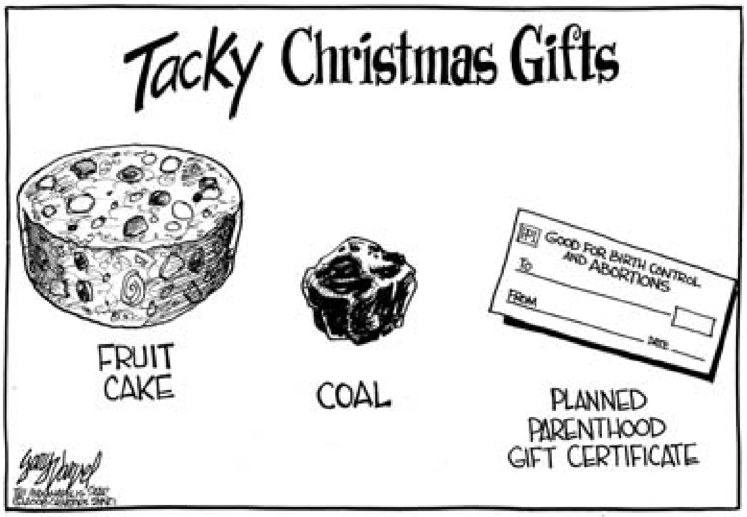
The torture narrative frames the key developments of the War on Terror as the systematic implementation of a torture regime. The best exemplar is British law professor Philippe Sands's *Torture Team: Deception, Cruelty and the Compromise of Law*, now heralded by leading Democrats as the definitive history. Perfecting the now-familiar script, Sands equates aggressive tactics with cruelty and cruelty with torture. He falsely claims that Rumsfeld authorized the Category III tactics even though the secretary not only rejected them but never wavered from mandating humane treatment. And Sands grossly misreports the account of key player Douglas Feith, then undersecretary of defense for policy. Sands writes that Feith advocated the denial of all Geneva safeguards, specifically including CA3 protections. Upon being challenged by Feith during congressional hearings, Sands finally released the recording of their interview, which conclusively proved Sands guilty of brazen distortions: Feith had favored Geneva protections; he'd denied only that terrorists were entitled to honorable prisoner-of-war status (a proposition even Sands did not dispute). And, in the entire lengthy interview, Sands had never even raised the matter of CA3—despite its centrality to his claims of Bush's systematic, lawless detainee abuse.

Such distortions are required because the torture narrative is a smear. Feith and Yoo are exceptional among the implicated former officials because they've demanded public scrutiny and the separation of fact from fiction. Theirs are lonely voices as the Left writes the history. That's tragic. The Bush administration got the security right: The intelligence haul from terrorist interrogations has been invaluable and has helped keep the nation safe from attack. The president, however, got the politics all wrong: clumsily paying lip service to the Left's torture rhetoric while sidestepping it in practice—shrinking from a full-throated defense of aggressive but humane interrogation tactics on the dubious ground that mounting one would enable terrorists to train against it.

The result is a double failure, of great consequence: We are saddled with a torture narrative that is far more a libel than a reality, and we have failed to reshape domestic and international law into tools that work against terrorists, rather than for them. **NR**



"I get out in sixty days—I guess I better update my résumé."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DATE
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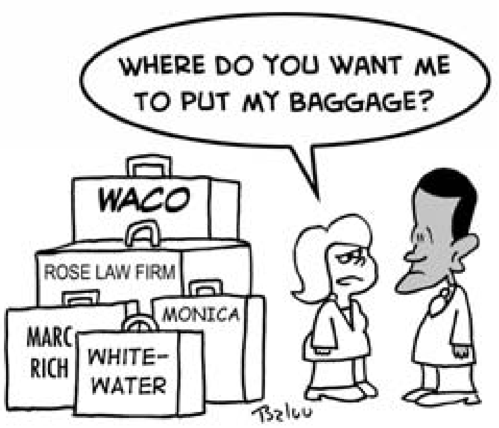
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ROSE LAW FIRM
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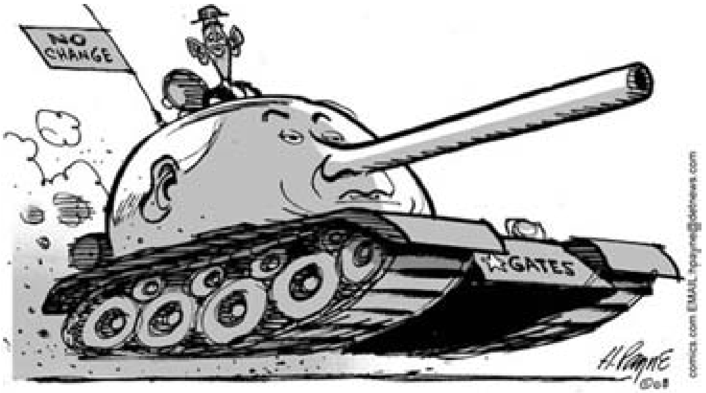
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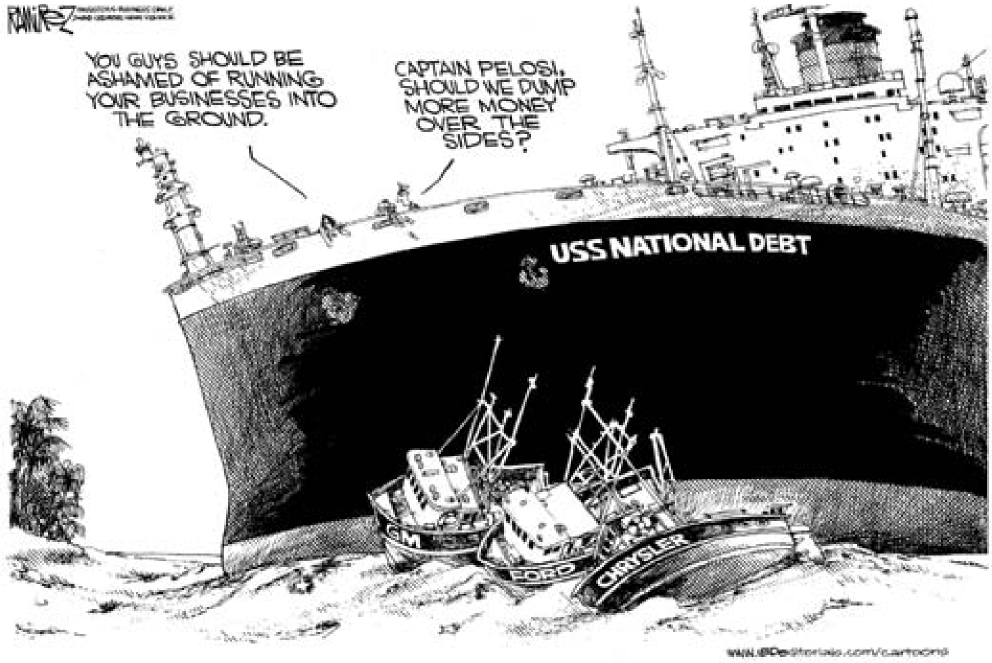
"PRESIDENT BUSH'S MILITARY POLICY WAS RECKLESS, DISHONEST, AND ALIENATED THE WORLD!... SO I'M KEEPING HIS DEFENSE SECRETARY."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CAPTAIN PELOSI, SHOULD WE DUMP MORE MONEY OVER THE SIDES?
USS NATIONAL DEBT
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the **long** view

ROB LONG

The Biden Family Wishes You and Yours a Very Merry Holiday Season!

Dear Friends and Family:

Well, I guess it's been a pretty eventful year for the Biden Family! As most of you know, I was on the short list for the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of my tireless work toward achieving a safe, lasting partition of what was once known as Iraq.

Wait a second here. Get a hold of yourself, Joe! You know me: old motormouth! Getting myself into trouble again with my straight talk! Let me rephrase that.

Dear Friends and Family:

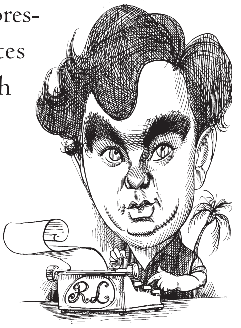
In 1984, as many of you know, I was diagnosed with a rare hair disease. And I'm proud to say that working with medical researchers and NASA scientists, I am now completely free of all hair diseases! My pioneering work has been recognized by the United States Patent and Trademark Office, and I hope to have an infomercial on the air before

Whoa there, Joseph! Gotta get a grip here! But that's life with Joe! Ask my better half! Never a dull moment, no sir. You know, friends, I call it like I see it. And so, yeah, sure, there are going to be some moments when I get a little off message or go a little off the beam, but that's because, as many of you are aware of, I am gifted with second sight, and I can see 17 minutes into the future.

Ouch! Just gave myself a little snap. I keep a rubber band around my wrist, and what the doctors told me (Hi, Doctor Leventhal! I know you're reading this!) was that every time I get a little wacky or a little fuzzy, just snap the band on my wrist and that'll remind me to come back to this moment, this present moment, and ask myself three questions: 1) Who am I?; 2) What was I just saying?; and 3) What was I supposed to be saying? Apparently, this is an old technique, and one that was used extensively by the former Czar of Russia, to whom I am directly related. It's an interesting story. It seems that—Ouch! Thanks! Back on track. Let's start again, shall we?

Dear Friends and Family:

As many of you know, I was recently almost elected to the presidency of the United States of America, which is a high honor and one I share with not too many people, let me tell you!



My friends, as high as that honor was, it's been eclipsed, if you can believe it, by being elected by my peers to another great office, that of the vice presidency of the United States, for which I receive a salary in the low-to-mid six figures plus housing.

There are other duties, of course, too numerous to mention here in this Christmas card, Holiday card, excuse me! You know, friends, I love and respect the Jewish people so much. That's what I said to Barack Obama when he asked me to be his vice president, I said, "Barack, let me tell you one thing about Joe Biden before we go off on this amazing adventure together," and he said, "Anything, Joe. You can tell me anything."

I forget what I told him, exactly, but I know that he laughed and smiled and I chucked him under the chin, and then I gave him a big, hurting hug. That's the kind of guy I am; ask around, everyone will say the same thing: That Joe Biden, they'll say at Cora's Coffee Shop on Montesquieu Avenue in Wilmington's Little China area, which is still there thanks to me and my fast work putting out that grease fire, that Joe Biden, they'll say, he's a hugger and a physical guy. Real physical. So there we were, me and the next president of the United States, just holding each other, and I gently stroked his head and said, "It's okay, Barack. It's going to be okay."

I'm going to take a breath here. Just kind of take a breather.

Great! Breather over!

My IQ, in case you were wondering, is about 175, which is higher probably than that of anyone reading this Christmas card.

Dear Friends and Family:

The Biden Family wishes you and yours a wonderful Holiday season, filled with joy and laughter and warmth.

As many of you know, I am now vice president of the United States, and am therefore quote-unquote above the law, as it were.

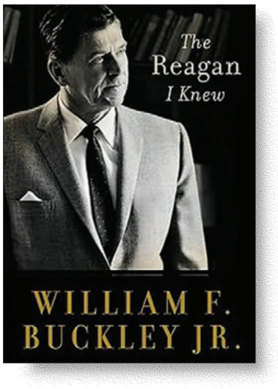
Snap! Thanks!

Dear Friends and Family:

Well, it's been an eventful 2008! And it's going to be an even more eventful 2009. Please be sure to stay in touch, and if you're in the D.C. area, don't hesitate to call or e-mail. We'd love to see you!

All the very best for a merry Holiday season!

Bill and Ron



The Reagan I Knew,
by William F. Buckley Jr.
(Basic, 279 pp., $25)

STEVEN F. HAYWARD

THERE are layers of bittersweet melancholia in Bill Buckley's memoir of his 30-year friendship with Ronald Reagan. *The Reagan I Knew* is Buckley's final book; indeed, he was working on the finishing touches the day he died in February. The memory of Reagan, and especially the élan of ascendant conservatism in the 1970s and 1980s that Buckley's memoir rekindles, burns hotter now that conservatives find themselves in the political wilderness again. And there are finally the sentimental qualities of both men—the talent for happiness and friendship along with a leavening of wit and a fitting sense of self-deprecation—that are exceedingly rare among great men in public life today.

The Reagan I Knew is equal parts memoir and a collection of the personal letters that passed between Buckley and both Nancy and Ronald Reagan starting in 1965. In fact the first communiqué came from Nancy, a thank-you note for a Christmas plant Bill had sent. One startling aspect of their friendship is that Buckley seemed to have been as close personally to Nancy as to Ronald, and perhaps closer given Ronald's famous reserve. Had Kitty Kelley seen any of the letters between Buckley and Nancy, she would no doubt have twisted their playful expressions of affection into a tawdry tale in her execrable biography of Nancy. "Longing to see you," Buckley wrote in one typical chatty missive, most of which were concluded with a running joke about meeting Nancy in Casablanca. Nancy could be equally affectionate in her replies: "I thought you had dropped out of my life completely!" she wrote Bill after a ten-month hiatus in contact in 1969. "I won't mention the months and months you've neglected me terribly and the awful effect this can have on a girl." The depth of their affection was not unnoticed by Ronald Reagan; he ended one letter to Bill: "Nancy sends her best (though she used a different word)."

While Buckley's memoir is silent on the Reagans' marriage and the frequently repeated theme of Reagan's supposed personal remoteness, he does lift the curtain on a few intimate details of the Reagans' family life, chiefly the difficulties with their two younger children. Buckley laments the atheism of Ron Reagan and the politics of Patti, even as he displays his typical generosity by celebrating their talents and personalities. (Included are a few letters from Buckley to a teenage Patti, praising her poetry.) Buckley offers a mild reproach of the Reagans' parenting: "The withdrawal, by Ron Jr., of any interest in spiritual life illuminates a study of him as well as of his parents. . . . What efforts were made—if any—to acquaint the boy with the historical and philosophical role of God in history?" The Reagans enlisted Buckley to the role of surrogate parent in one crucial matter: Ron Jr.'s decision to drop out of Yale to pursue a career as a ballet dancer. When the effort at dissuading Ron from his rash decision failed, Ronald Reagan cut off all financial support for his son: "Ronald Reagan was as determined to subject his son to poverty as Ron Jr. was to live in it."

Then there was the "endless matter" of Patti, "an unsilenced and evidently unsilenceable liberal." Throughout the 1980s Patti seemed determined to exploit every opportunity to repudiate her father's politics and embarrass her mother, culminating in an appearance in *Playboy*. The reader winces when Buckley records a tearful Nancy telling him, "I love my children, but I don't always like them."

The political connection between the two men is the dominant attraction of the book, however, and while Buckley's memoir is spare in its interpretation of Reagan, his retrospective account does contain a few revisions and revelations about his perception of Reagan. Buckley first met him in 1961, before Reagan's political career had begun in earnest, and like many others Buckley initially underestimated his political potential. But not for long. The book includes a long excerpt from Reagan's first appearance on *Firing Line* in 1967, where Reagan displayed thoughtfulness toward governing and a principled grasp of federalism. At this early moment it was clear to any unbiased observer that Reagan was no lightweight.

Buckley writes at the outset that he views himself as having been a "tutor" to Reagan, and recalls that after Reagan won the 1980 election he considered changing his occupational designation in *Who's Who* to "ventriloquist." Although Reagan gave Buckley and NATIONAL REVIEW some credit for his having become a Republican, there are subtle traces in Reagan's letters of his independent, self-taught mind. Buckley surely knew this, and it explains why he resisted the obvious temptation to send Reagan a constant stream of thoughts during Reagan's Oval Office years. (Buckley had the special address code to get letters directly to the president's desk.) Buckley was content to allow NATIONAL REVIEW to be the chief vehicle of communication with Reagan on political matters, and only occasionally wrote directly to Reagan about pressing political topics. He recalls some disagreements and anxieties he had about Reagan's course in the Oval Office, but the pattern of how each man dealt with the

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other had been established by their most significant disagreement, which Buckley records at length: the Panama Canal treaty of 1977.

This clash illustrates several traits of both men. Reagan showed his resolution and imperviousness to criticism even from a close ally, while Buckley showed his gentleness in opposing his favorite politician. Both displayed their playful sides in the aftermath: Before Buckley arrived for a visit, Reagan put up signs in his driveway, Burma-Shave style, reading: "We Built It . . . We Paid For It . . . It's Ours!" For the next decade Buckley ended many of his letters to Reagan with a mock warning against giving away the Erie Canal, alternating with a running jest about being Reagan's ambassador to Afghanistan and directing the anti-Soviet effort there.

Fully appreciating Reagan's independence of mind, Buckley engaged Reagan selectively and with finesse during his presidency. In the early 1970s Buckley had advised Reagan to come out against détente, and recommended that he consult Sen. Henry "Scoop" Jackson's staff ("the best pool of young men around"), many of whom would later join Reagan's administration. Yet by 1980 Buckley was a go-between in establishing a détente between Reagan and Henry Kissinger, who had been a major target of Reagan's attack on détente in 1976.

Buckley fretted to and commiserated with Reagan about personnel appointments, about hanging tough with his economic program during the grinding 1981–82 recession, about David Stockman's defection, about China policy, about the ruckus over Reagan's visit to the Bitburg cemetery in West Germany in 1985, and about many other topics. Buckley watered down some criticisms of Reagan that appeared in National Review, and on a few occasions suppressed contemplated criticisms, above all assuring Reagan that "*no personal criticism, i.e., questioning your motives, will be published.*"

In a 1984 letter, Buckley wrote Reagan: "I can't pretend I swing with all your decisions, but with most of them I do most heartily." But in the second term Buckley told him he was increasingly worried that the president "seemed to me and to many conservatives to come perilously close to trusting the Soviet Union." This anxiety crystallized with the signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty in 1987. Buckley joined Kissinger, Richard Nixon, and a large cast of conservatives in opposition to the INF pact. Reagan defended himself stoutly in his private replies to Buckley, leaving Buckley to repair to their friendship and agreeing to disagree. "Damn I wish I could be on your side on that one," Buckley wrote to Reagan in January 1988. "Haven't had a significant difference with you since the Panama Canal."

Recalling this chapter in the Reagan story leads to Buckley's one significant revelation and revision: the doubt that, had the Soviet Union launched a nuclear attack, Reagan would have ordered a retaliation. Buckley reprints the moving speech he gave at National Review's 30th-anniversary gala dinner in 1985, with Reagan present, where he explained that the West's existence depended on our willingness to sacrifice it in an instant if necessary. "Twenty years after saying that, in the presence of the man I was talking about, I changed my mind," Buckley wrote.

Reagan's sincere anti-nuclear pacifism is not a new theme among the writers who have studied him, but it is still amazing to contemplate. That Reagan largely concealed his probable dereliction from the pre-programmed duty of Cold War presidents was of a piece with his personal reserve, and must be closely related to his drive for the end of the Cold War by supremely Machiavellian means. It suggests new dimensions of Reagan's remarkable political character. It would have been good to hear more from Buckley about this tantalizing aspect of the Reagan story, given that the Cold War was the central preoccupation of Buckley's career.

Despite this revision, the conclusion of Buckley's 30th-anniversary meditation holds up as strongly today as it did that night in 1985, and serves as a fitting coda for both of our deceased heroes: "I pray that my son, when he is sixty, and your son, when he is sixty, and the sons and daughters of our guests tonight will live in a world from which the great ugliness that has scarred our century has passed. Enjoying their freedom, they will be grateful that, at the threatened nightfall, the blood of their fathers ran strong." **NR**

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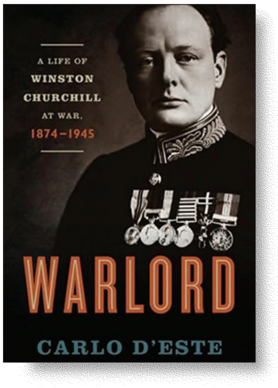


Warlord: A Life of Winston Churchill at War, 1874–1945,
by Carlo D'Este (HarperCollins,
864 pp., $39.95)

DAVID PRYCE-JONES

THE British media now and again run polls to ask who are the greatest Englishmen of all time, and Winston Churchill invariably comes out on top, ahead of Shakespeare, Newton, and Darwin. His image, complete with homburg hat and bow tie, cigar and two fingers raised in his trademark V for Victory salute, is still within living memory, but the man has achieved almost mythical stature. *Churchillian* is the adjective commonly applied to anyone in public life making a spirited defense of democracy and freedom.

Born in 1874 into one of the grandest aristocratic families, he seems to have been very much a man of his era, with a belief in Britain and its empire, and the privileges and duties that went with it. Pushing himself forward, ambitious to a fault, he spent his life at the center of British politics as though by right. Contentious, he spoke and wrote as he pleased and at the time many people neither liked nor trusted him for it. (An anecdote: My father ghosted one of Churchill's books, *Great Contemporaries*. Very strangely, Churchill retained for his version the structure of chapter, paragraph, and even sentence and punctuation, but none of the wording.) Perhaps he would have been just another 20th-century British politician, except that in the 1930s Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany.

The determination to resist Hitler was not a foregone conclusion. Elements of public opinion were in favor of coming to terms with Nazism. Lord Halifax, Lloyd George, and even the masochistic socialist Sir Stafford Cripps might have led the country in a policy of collaboration as Marshal Pétain did in France. In the background were the pro-German Duke of Windsor and Sir Oswald Mosley and his Fascists. Churchill spelled out that the independence of Britain and the safeguarding of the civilized world were at stake, and hindsight has only substantiated how right he was. It still seems slightly improbable, too quixotic to be true, that when Churchill became prime minister in May 1940—already aged 65, what's more—he offered defiance but no real prospect of defeating Hitler, and the survival of Britain could not be taken for granted. The Third Reich looked set to master Europe indefinitely and fatefully. Churchill's alternative of solitary defiance from a position of weakness was a gigantic gamble.

Of the making of books about Churchill, therefore, there is no end. What is reality, what is myth? Revisionist arguments of several sorts spring up from the standoff between him and Hitler. Some depict Churchill as irrational, unnecessarily aggressive, sacrificing his own people out of bloodlust, or as immoral as the Nazis in waging war, for instance sanctioning the mass bombing of cities. He may even have considered using poison gas if circumstances demanded it. Others like to claim that victory came at too high a price, costing Britain its status as a world power.

In *Warlord*, Carlo D'Este investigates in detail how Churchill came to find the strength of character to oppose Hitler. A former U.S. Army officer who has become a military historian, D'Este takes the view that his early career of soldiering made Churchill the man he was, and gave him lasting heroic values. The sound of gunfire aroused every fiber in him; he could hardly keep away from any fight going. A biography written from a standpoint that necessarily limits treatment of other aspects of his career, this book is a thoughtful and authoritative examination of Churchill's lifelong fascination with war. Importantly—but maybe a little contradictorily—fascination with war should not be confused with love of it; and D'Este insists that Churchill was no warmonger. For him, as for almost all who saw the man close-up in peace or war and left a record of him, Churchill was someone whose virtues and flaws were equally extreme, and often too close to be easily distinguished in his decisions and actions. Had he not been such a man, however, the course of history would undoubtedly have been different.

Churchill joined the British army when it seemed to offer adventure and invincibility all over the world. No matter the conceit or habitual blunders of politicians and their military advisers, decline and loss were inconceivable. As a junior lieutenant in a smart cavalry regiment, he was posted to India. There he took part in the Malakand Field Force, which was fighting tribal wars in what is now the frontier area between Pakistan and Afghanistan; the territory, the aims, and even the tactics of al-Qaeda and the Taliban would be recognizable to Churchill. Trading on his social position, he managed afterwards to transfer to the expedition led by Lord Kitchener in the Sudan against the Mahdi, an Islamist fundamentalist of that day. To the end of his life Churchill liked to reminisce about the spectacular cavalry charge in which he had ridden at the battle of Omdurman. Finally he contrived to cover the Boer War in South Africa as a newspaper correspondent with military connections. Ambushed on an armored train, he was taken prisoner by the Boers. Escaping in dramatic circumstances and writing up the exploit, he became a national hero overnight. The way was then open to a seat in Parliament, a deserved place among the great and the good, and in due course promotion to the cabinet.

The Boer War, Churchill was to say later, was "the last enjoyable war." As D'Este rightly likes to stress, Churchill essentially imagined war as something having to do with glory and gallantry and drawn sabers. Even as prime minister he was still romanticizing in that outdated style. Preparation and practice were something else. Studying the changing nature of warfare, he made it his business to keep up with evolving technology, and even learned to pilot a plane. Attending what were rather ominous military exercises in Germany as early as 1906, he could write that “much as war attracts me and fascinates my mind with its tremendous situations, I feel more deeply every year . . . what vile and wicked folly and barbarism it all is.”

In World War I, he held the post of First Lord of the Admiralty, and was therefore responsible for the navy. The strategy of knocking Germany’s ally Turkey out of the war by a combined naval and military invasion at Gallipoli revealed the way that Churchill’s imagination could run away with him. With hindsight, the operation still seems to hold the prospect of a masterstroke. Poor execution, and the high casualty rate, made Churchill appear reckless with the lives of others. Forced to resign, he took the extraordinary step of returning to a regiment and spending half a year in the trenches in France. He was longing to be there, according to a well-placed observer, Margot Asquith (wife of the then prime minister), who noted in her diary that he was “dreaming of war, big buoyant, happy. . . . He is a born soldier.” D’Este quotes another biographer that even the “mechanised butchery of the Great War” did not completely dispel the “glittering lure” of war.

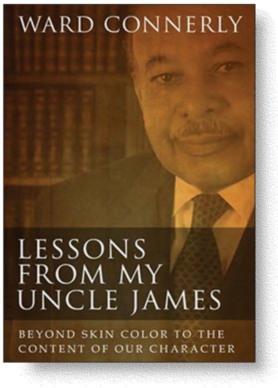
> ‘Much as war attracts me and fascinates my mind with its tremendous situations, I feel more deeply every year . . . what vile and wicked folly and barbarism it all is.’

Opposing and defeating Hitler stretched Churchill’s imagination to the full. He was constantly coming up with fresh ideas for attack—in Norway, in Greece and Crete, in the Mediterranean from Sicily to Anzio, through the Balkans. At one point he became fixated on seizing the insignificant Italian island of Pantelleria. When such plans proved unfeasible or disastrous, he sulked. “Psalm-singing uniformed defeatists,” he said, were getting the better of him. A “Ministry of Negation” frustrated his every idea. His generals were cowards, they refused to go on the offensive, they couldn’t hold a candle to Rommel. Several were rather brutally sacked before he found in General Montgomery someone as set on victory as he himself was. A sense of the responsibility that rested with him and him alone seems to have been the cause of “black dog,” as he called the depression that sometimes afflicted him.

The chief of staff, Field Marshal Alan Brooke, had to bear the brunt of Churchill’s impatience and that “glittering lure” of action. The relationship between the two is always riveting. Churchill once complained that Brooke was too cautious, and therefore had to go: “He hates me. I know he does. I can see hatred looking out of his eyes.” When this was reported to Brooke, he replied, “I don’t hate him; I *love* him, but the moment I tell him that I agree with him and I don’t, that’s the time to get rid of me.” Informed of this, Churchill’s eyes filled with tears. (The impossibility of such an exchange between Hitler and his generals, Jodl or Keitel, is one of the many reasons why they lost the war.) After wrangling for months over the strategy to be pursued in invading the continent of Europe, General Eisenhower, then the commander in chief of Allied forces, rather similarly described Churchill as “a cantankerous yet adorable father.”

Tears also filled Churchill’s eyes when he became prime minister and well-wishers in the street cheered him. “Poor people,” he said, “they trust me, and I can give them nothing but disaster for quite a long time.” He quite often wept at the sight of bomb damage in London. He shed tears over the sinking of the French fleet at Mers-el-Kébir, when singing “Onward Christian Soldiers” with President Roosevelt, when inspecting troops in the desert after the battle of Alamein, and when marching with General de Gaulle in liberated Paris—once again such reactions are inconceivable in the case of Hitler. It might seem mythical that Churchill could give way to his emotions so easily and yet be fascinated by war, but that was the reality, and the achievement of this book is to demonstrate that this is what made him a great human being in the time of testing. **NR**

His Uncle’s Son


WARD CONNERLY
LESSONS FROM MY UNCLE JAMES
BEYOND SKIN COLOR TO THE CONTENT OF OUR CHARACTER

Lessons from My Uncle James: Beyond Skin Color to the Content of Our Character, by Ward Connerly (Encounter, 93 pp., $19.95)

CRISTOPHER RAPP

On November 4, as the prospect of Barack Obama’s election had commentators harkening back to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, voters in Colorado and Nebraska considered identical ballot initiatives that read like a summary of the Act itself: “The state shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting.”

The driving force behind both initiatives was Ward Connerly, the former University of California regent who spearheaded successful efforts to ban racial preferences in California (1996), Washington (1998), and Michigan (2006). Each time a Connerly initiative had come before voters, it had passed with room to spare.

This time around, the results were mixed. Nebraskans approved the measure by a resounding margin of 58 to 42 percent, but in Colorado it was narrowly defeated, 51 to 49 percent.

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Both initiatives slightly outperformed the McCain-Palin ticket in their respective states; opponents of racial preferences have also recently won court victories in Michigan and in the Federal Circuit. Connerly believes that racial preferences are on their way out. “With each passing day,” he writes in *Lessons from My Uncle James*, preferences “resemble more and more the appendix of the body politic, a vestigial reminder of a color-coded past.”

One suspects that governmental color-coding will hang on a bit longer than Connerly suggests. Yet *Lessons* is not principally concerned with racial preferences, but rather with the challenges of self-government, understood as the task of ordering not only our democracy, but ourselves:

> As we at last seem to be “getting beyond race,” we face a dilemma. If, as Martin Luther King “dreamed” in his great 1963 speech [at the Lincoln Memorial], the color of our skin seems to matter less with each passing day, the content of our character must necessarily become ever more important. The more we see ourselves as individuals rather than as members of some racial or ethnic group struggling for advantage in a zero-sum political game, the more we must think about the moral guidelines we use in building our individual lives.

Wardell Connerly was born in 1939, in rural, segregated Leesville, La., into a family that was equal parts French Canadian, African-American, Choctaw Indian, and Irish. In the melanin-obsessed South, his family suffered the contempt of whites and the mistrust of some blacks.

A pair of family tragedies brought James Louis into his nephew Ward’s life. First, Ward’s father, Roy Connerly, a drinker, gambler, and skirt-chaser, abandoned his family when Ward was an infant. (Ward would not see him for another 50 years.) Just a few years later, Ward’s mother died. The decision of Ward’s grandmother to send him to live with his Aunt Bert and Uncle James Louis in Washington state was a long-overdue stroke of luck for the youngster.

Six feet tall and strong, the son of black sharecroppers, James had worked as a deckhand on cargo boats on the Mississippi before escaping segregation by moving to the Pacific Northwest and getting a job at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard. Connerly writes of his uncle: “The only thing he wanted from the world was for it to respect him and regard him as a man—a word he pronounced, in the down-home accent he never quite lost, as ‘*mane*.’” He became Ward’s father figure, protector, and teacher.

Connerly devotes each chapter to a different set of lessons, about work, responsibility, religion, education, love, and the other building blocks of a meaningful life, illustrating each with stories from his life with his uncle.

One of the most telling vignettes comes in a chapter on manhood. Ward, at 9 or 10 years old, came home from school having been thoroughly whupped in his first playground fight. When he heard Ward’s self-pitying tale, Uncle James responded without sympathy. “I want you to understand me,” he said. “You don’t fight back next time this happens and you’re going to get two a**-kickings—the one you get at school and the one you get from me when you come home. And the one you get at home will be worse than the one at school.” James didn’t want him to go looking for fights, but he did want him to fight back.

The lesson has proven its worth during Connerly’s career as the country’s most conspicuous opponent of group preferences. “There have been anonymous death threats,” he writes. “I have been called every name in the progressive book—Race Traitor, House N****r, Uncle Tom, Oreo. . . . I’ve always felt him there beside me, promising that second a**-kicking if I didn’t stand up for myself and the causes I espoused. . . . There’s only you and the voice inside. And if you want to be a *mane*, you had better listen hard to this voice and be true to its commands.”

Another chapter discusses the importance of seeing issues from your opponents’ perspective. Whenever Ward got a little too enamored of his own arguments, James would remind him that that “the smallest pancake has two sides,” and pantomime “the motion of someone using a spatula to pry up a concept in order to check out what might be underneath.” Of course, some pancakes have only one *good* side: The chapter on education discusses Connerly’s efforts as student-body president at Sacramento State to fight housing discrimination in the neighborhoods around the campus, efforts that contributed to the passage of a statewide fair-housing act. Connerly’s critics will be surprised by this; they shouldn’t be.

This slim volume calls to mind Irving Kristol’s observation that every generation faces a barbarian invasion in the form of its own children, who need to be civilized. *Lessons from My Uncle James* provides real-world examples of how bedrock civilizing principles are passed on—or, as James Louis himself might put it, how a boy is raised to be a *mane*. **NR**

DEAD RECKONING

Halfway between the familiar harbor
And our destination, soon it seemed
Partway between nowhere and nowhere;
The stars we counted on to plot our course
Fled before a mass of ghostly clouds.
And there was nothing more to guide us
But the ship’s log and compass,
A scribbled record of our starting out
And the wobbling arrow of direction,
Vague tokens of the past and present,
And the sensation of speed and distance
In the puffed sail, the rope in our wake.
As for the future: The vision of a coast
Unknown and indescribable seemed
The more precious the longer we were lost.
Day dawned upon fog as dense as night.
And some, after many days like this
Turn upon each other in blind rage,
Dive headlong from the foretop,
Or drown in grog, forgetting
Why we ever left home, signed on
For such a voyage, to a land unknown
When nothing had been promised beyond hope.

—DANIEL MARK EPSTEIN

■ MUSIC ■

Centenarian Of the Hour

JAY NORDLINGER

ELLIOTT CARTER, the American composer, turns 100 this month—and the music world is duly celebrating. There are Carter-centered concerts, there are boxes of retrospective CDs. Carter is surely the senior composer in the world, and he is steadily working. But he is not the longest-lived composer we've had. That distinction probably goes to Leo Ornstein, who lived from 1893 to 2002—to the age of 108. The musicologist David Dubal once told me that Ornstein must be the only person to have written music in three different centuries.

When Carter was born in 1908, Theodore Roosevelt was president. Mahler and Debussy were still working. Rimsky-Korsakov had died a few months before. Richard Strauss was only in his mid-40s. Rachmaninoff was merely in his mid-30s. As Carter himself points out, he has seen tremendous changes, in music and elsewhere.

Amid the celebrations, I pay him a visit. Carter is a native New Yorker, and still lives in the city: in Greenwich Village. He has occupied the same, gracious apartment since 1945. Among his neighbors were E. E. Cummings, Marianne Moore, and the composer Edgard Varèse. In conversation, Carter is quick and amusing, with a ready smile and a twinkle in his eye. He talks in a way that very, very few New Yorkers do now: New England-y. You encounter this type of speech, in Manhattan, only once in a while.

Carter's paternal grandfather, Eli, fought in the Civil War. He was at Gettysburg, in fact—and Carter knew him well. "Grandpa was a jolly old man, who had lots of fun, and was very shrewd. How he made the transition from fighting in the Civil War to becoming the leading lace-curtain importer in New York City, I cannot understand, but that is what he did." Eventually, the grandfather sold the business to the father (Elliott Sr.). He did so "at a considerable price, meaning we were quite poor for some time!"

Carter was already eight years old when America entered World War I. Living on 114th St. at Riverside Drive, he saw a little bit of this war: "The Hudson River was full of British warships, and I remember very distinctly British sailors wandering around on Riverside Drive." Radio was new then, and the young Carter toyed with them—homemade—on the roof of his building.

Carter in 1917, the year the U.S. entered the world war

COURTESY OF ELLIOTT CARTER

After the war, his father took him on several trips to Europe, and they saw the devastation that had occurred: "dreadful things." Hunger was acute. A later trip took them to Baden-Baden in 1923—and Carter remembers reading in a newspaper that President Harding had died.

Neither of Carter's parents was musical, and they would certainly not have chosen a composing career for their son. But Carter caught a break at the famed Horace Mann School (whose students included Eugene O'Neill's son, who became one of Carter's best friends). A teacher introduced the kids to Charles Ives, and the composer took an interest in Carter. "Mr. Ives used to subscribe to a box in Carnegie Hall, and he'd occasionally invite me to sit with him." He also played the young man some of his own compositions—for instance, the *Concord Sonata* (in a version different from the one known by the public).

A pivotal moment came when Carter heard Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, a notorious departure in music. He figured, then, that he had to be a composer.

He went to Harvard College, in part to be near the Boston Symphony, which, under Serge Koussevitzky, was playing a lot of modern music. He did not enroll in the music department, however: "In those years, the department was entirely devoted to teaching church organists, and it was extremely conventional. I was interested in what was called advanced or avant-garde music," and they were not. He studied English, availing himself of such eminent scholars as Irving Babbitt and George Lyman Kittredge ("a tyrant!"). Another teacher was Alfred North Whitehead, the philosopher.

After college, Carter enrolled in the Harvard graduate school—in music. The atmosphere had rapidly grown more congenial. His two principal teachers were Walter Piston and Gustav Holst (composer of *The Planets*). Piston, says Carter, was a "fussy" man who "liked to turn everything into a rather disagreeable joke." But one could learn a great deal from him: particularly about the instruments of the orchestra and how to write for them. Holst, visiting from England, was "rather aged" and had poor eyesight. That meant that the students had to play him their pieces on the piano, rather than handing in manuscripts. "Whenever we wrote anything dissonant, he would say, 'You'd better learn to play the piano better'!"

By the way, Holst—whom Carter has described (correctly) as "rather aged"—died at 59, not long after he taught Carter. Carter, of course, is 41 years older.

After Harvard, Carter went to Paris to study with Nadia Boulanger, teacher of generations of Americans (in particular). Ives advised Carter against this move, thinking that he should remain on native grounds; Carter went anyway. And he has many interesting stories and memories about "Nadia." "Evidently, she had been told, when she was very young, that she would go blind," which indeed happened, but over decades. "So she made an enormous effort to memorize everything. And as a result, she had all these scores right in her head," enabling her to cite you something in an instant.

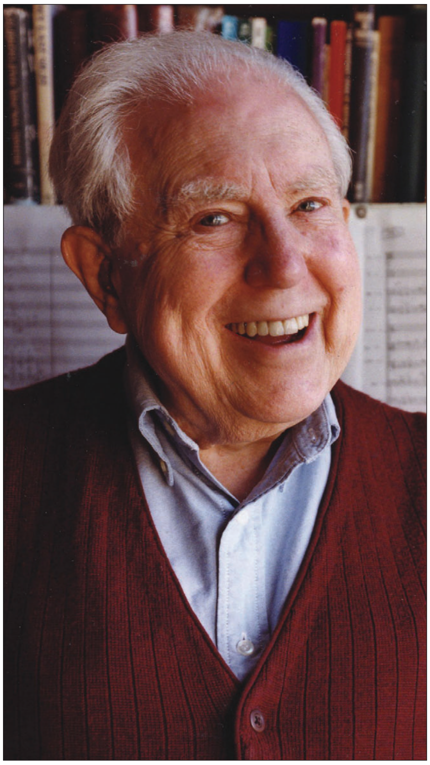
Carter himself would become a teacher: at Columbia, Yale, Juilliard, and other places. One of his earliest jobs was at St. John's College, the Great Books redoubt in Annapolis. It was Carter's mission to introduce music to the program. He taught Euclid's geometry and suchlike, finding out what the ancients had to say about music. Carter's scientific knowledge is considerable (even if he demurs from this assessment). Has it been a help in his music? "I don't think so. Scientific knowledge is above what I do in music. I'm concerned with a very practical field"—fitting music to performers and so on. "I don't care what the numerical relations of the notes are and all that." Time was, numerical relations were all the rage in composition. "I tried to write like that once, and it bored me, so I stopped."

Evolving as a composer, Carter made important investigations into rhythm. "I spent some time in Tunisia, and got very interested in the drumming patterns of Arabic music." Carter is liable to have two different speeds going at the same time. He is a pioneer in what is possible in tempo and rhythm. And "my music got started, I think, by listening to jazz. In jazz, as in almost all dance music, there's a regular beat in the background and, against that, improvisation. My music is all like that."

Some people think that melody is passé. Does Carter? No, he says—but one can mean many different things by melody. He writes melodies that may not be recognized as such by listeners. And Schubert, he says, could make a melody out of just a couple of notes. Moreover, "Nadia used to talk about 'Tea for Two'"—there is a real economy about that melody.

When Carter speaks of "the old music," he does not mean Monteverdi, Byrd, and Rameau—or only them. He means the sweep of music from those early composers up through Wagner or so. And the "old" composers did well in that "they dealt with the material available at the time and made it speak very strongly." But he regards this music as belonging to the past, and "no longer the most vivid thing that one can do." The old music may be "fantastically beautiful," but "it doesn't quite speak in the way that modern music does." (On that, many, of diverse opinions, can agree.)

What about the so-called Neo-Romantics such as Barber—can Carter respect them, even as he diverges from them? "Well, some of us felt that the kind of music Sam wrote had already been done, only done better than anybody could do it now. Therefore there was no reason to do it now." Grinning, Carter says, "What Sam did was deplorable," but his music, nonetheless, "is rather good."



An ebullient Carter in 2000

MEREDITH HEUER

Carter has known many composers well—including Stravinsky—but I ask him which composer from the past he would most like to meet and talk things over with. He names Debussy. Carter had plenty of talks with Stravinsky—"but he'd say, 'Oh, I forgot how I wrote that,' so you couldn't get anything out of it!"

Entering his eleventh decade, Carter feels he is still learning about music: "Each piece I write I consider an adventure. I've learned a lot by trying to be a composer." And does he think he has gotten better? "Of course I think I've gotten better—who wouldn't think that?"

Then there is the touchy question of whether he cares whether people like his music. "That depends on the degree of 'care' you mean. What I care about is having performers who like my music and want to play it and play it well." The public has a way of coming around. As to whether Carter believes that his music will last, "You tell me what the future's going to be, and I'll tell you the answer. God only knows the future. In my own lifetime, there has been such an enormous change in every conceivable way that it would be hard to predict the future"—even ten or fifteen years out.

He does not have a roster of pieces he feels he needs to write—he simply goes from one project or commission to the next. "I guess I'm just walking through life, where my music is concerned." But there are certain books he would like to read. He's reading through Shakespeare's plays now, and he would like to read more Balzac, Dostoevsky, and Proust. He does not think he will get to it, though.

And he does not listen to a lot of music on his stereo. "At my age, I'm extremely busy writing my music and keeping fatigue out of the way. Most of the music is in my head by now. I don't like to listen to recordings of my own music, either: because a) people don't play it right and b) I feel I didn't write the right thing. I think I should have changed something." Does he ever go back and revise? "Yes, but my experience is, having done that, I like it better the way it was the first time!"

Toward the end of our discussion, I ask whether the 100th-birthday celebrations are a bother to him, distracting from his work, or a pleasure. "They bother me," he says, "but I'd be disappointed if they didn't happen." Rising to leave, I say, "Well, we've covered a lot of ground." He says, "I didn't talk about my wife, but . . ." Is that not a lovely tribute from a husband to a wife?

We do indeed talk about her. She was Helen Jones Carter, a "sculptress," as her husband says. A year older than he, she died five years ago, aged 95. I gaze at an example of her work: a self-portrait. Striking, and beautiful. **NR**

■ FILM ■

Haunting Us Still

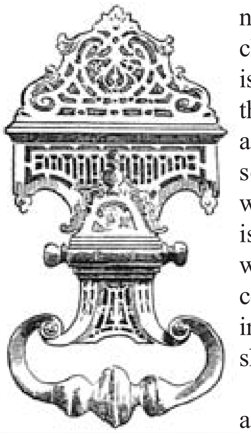
ROSS DOUTHAT

In a sense, Richard Nixon's long-nursed hope that time would vindicate his presidency looks even more unlikely now than it did on that overcast August day in 1974 when the helicopter bore him away from the White House, and into history, covered in Watergate's disgrace. Thirty-four years and six presidencies later, he still gets dreadful marks in historians' polls and public-opinion surveys alike. And every attempt at rehabilitation—Conrad Black's doorstop of a biography is probably the most impassioned recent example of the genre—finds itself quickly undercut by the release of yet another salvo from the arsenal of Nixon tapes, featuring our 37th president at his snarling, profane, and paranoid worst.

Yet part of Nixon might be pleased with how he's remembered even so. We may not like him much, but more than almost any of his presidential peers, our culture can't seem to let go of him. Reagan and Kennedy may be more beloved, but both have become plaster saints, remembered more as icons than as human beings. Nixon the man, meanwhile, is somehow more alive today than ever. Any president can earn the approbation of historians: Only Tricky Dick has become a figure out of Shakespeare. All the world's a stage, and he stalks its floorboards even now—in literature and cinema, high culture and low culture alike. The book titles testify to his grip on our imagination: *Nixon at the Movies*, *Nixon's Shadow*, *Nixonland*. You can almost imagine him cackling to Haldeman, in whatever dim purgatorial cell they share: *They can't get enough of me! They've got Anthony Hopkins playing me at the movies! You don't see Academy Award winners lining up to play Jimmy Effing Carter, do you? And* Nixon in China*, my God . . . Nobody ever wrote an opera about Lyndon Johnson, did they?*

Frost/Nixon, the hit play turned Ron Howard movie about the ex-president's first big post-Watergate interview, only offers more grist for our ghostly Nixon's mill. The interview, conducted over hours and days by the British celebrity journalist David Frost—who paid Nixon a cool $600,000 for the privilege—is an interesting historical footnote, but a footnote nonetheless, and it's hard to imagine a similar encounter between, say, George W. Bush and Ryan Seacrest being turned into an Oscar-bait film in 2038. But this is Nixon, so the usual rules don't apply: Even the footnotes are transfixing.

Still, the movie is trying a bit too hard. The original play and the screenplay alike are the work of Peter Morgan, a British dramatist with a facility for intimate portraits of powerful people in crisis. These have ranged from the sublime (Helen Mirren as a post-Diana Elizabeth II in *The Queen*) to the engaging (Forest Whitaker's Idi Amin in *The Last King of Scotland*, gulping down the scenery and asking for seconds) to the irredeemably lousy (both Boleyn sisters and the king they loved in *The Other Boleyn Girl*). But all of these efforts had the advantage of revolving around an *actual* moment of political crisis, either for the English monarchy, past or present, or for the unhappy Uganda of the 1970s. In Frost's interviews with Nixon, by contrast, the ex-president's crisis, and the country's, was long past; the stakes were high, in a sense, but only for the interviewer himself.



The movie pretends otherwise, insisting that this was a chance for Nixon to redeem himself in history's eyes, and a chance for television to give the disgraced president the trial he never had. But really it was just a chance for Frost, who had staked a fortune and his reputation on a gambit that more legitimate reporters regarded with distaste, to pry enough interesting material out of his subject to generate ratings, cash flow, and respect. This is a movie about the television business, in other words, that thinks of itself as a movie about high politics—and strains, portentously and unsuccessfully, to make good on that boast.

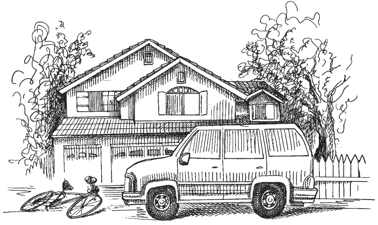
The central conceit is the interview as boxing match: The bantamweight Frost (Michael Sheen), grinning and insecure, gathers his trainers—the choleric Jimmy Reston (Sam Rockwell) and the sanguine Bob Zelnick (Oliver Platt)—to prep him for the fight with endless reams of research. The confident heavyweight—Frank Langella, all gravelly gravitas and buried anger—awaits the challenger, huddling with his trainer (Kevin Bacon as Jack Brennan, Nixon's ex-Marine adviser) and reassuring himself that the fight will be a record-padding knockout. The duel itself takes place in rounds, under klieg lights, with the two performers bobbing and weaving, looking for an advantage. Frost starts with a wild swing—"Why didn't you burn the tapes?"—and misses badly, and for a while the champ has everything his way. But the last round decides the fight . . .

As the foregoing suggests, in the movie's world Frost comes out the winner, because in the final hour of the interview his flurry of well-researched questions about Watergate makes his subject squirm, and produces the memorably appalling claim that "when the president does it, that means it is not illegal." But in our world, the world of the moviegoing public, Richard Nixon wins *Frost/Nixon* in a walk. The ostensible protagonist never comes into focus as a character: Sheen's performance is engaging but all surface, and the movie seems afraid to actually make him as unlikable a self-promoter as he probably was. Langella's Nixon, though, is larger, physically and otherwise, than the real-life article, containing multitudes and throwing the rest of the cast into his shade.

True, we hear a fair amount about his crimes, particularly from the griping, self-righteous Reston, but what we see in Langella's brooding, sympathetic portrait is what Nixon would no doubt wish for us to see: a Great Man brought low by his demons and mistakes, but shot through with greatness nonetheless. Nixon's essential smallness, and the grasping grubbiness of his crimes and sins, is transmuted, for dramatic purposes, into the stuff of great American tragedy: Lear on the heath, Macbeth facing Banquo's ghost. If this is how we're to remember Nixon, then he's on his way to winning history's favor after all—not as our greatest president, perhaps, but as the most memorable. **NR**

■ THE STRAGGLER ■

The Cold Eye



JOHN DERBYSHIRE

PRES. GEORGE W. BUSH would "like to be a president [known] as somebody who liberated 50 million people and helped achieve peace," it says here. Well, that's nice. I don't recall either of my votes for the gentleman having been cast with that in, or anywhere near, my mind, but I won't begrudge the departing president such consolations as he can find. Meanwhile my investments are down 35 percent from last year-end, a friend has just lost his business and had to put his house up for sale, and a Democrat steeped in crackpot college radicalism is heading to the White House.

Fans of H. L. Mencken will at any rate know where they are with that latest statement of our departing president: viz., in the presence of a World Saver. From Mencken's obituary of Calvin Coolidge: "Counting out Harding as a cipher only, Dr. Coolidge was preceded by one World Saver and followed by two more. What enlightened American, having to choose between any of them and another Coolidge, would hesitate for an instant?"

Terry Teachout, in his splendid 2002 book about the Sage of Baltimore, frowns at Mencken's many mockings of Coolidge, noting that the 30th President was a *cum laude* graduate of Amherst who read Cicero in the original and had a well-thought-out philosophy of governance. (Teachout omits to mention that Coolidge also attempted a translation of Dante.) Mencken's scorn for World Savers is worth recalling, though. Indeed, it is worth emulating. It is possible that we traded one World Saver for another on November 4 last. We should hope not, but it is possible.

I had to brush up my Mencken recently after being invited to talk to the Mencken Society in Baltimore. I read the *Chrestomathy* all through for the first time, and Teachout's book, and reacquainted myself with *The American Language*, which I had bought and read many years ago as part of my self-Americanization project.

With things in the state they are in, Mencken's loathing of politicians and "jobholders," along with his contempt for World Savers and "uplift," are hard to resist. In one 1938 edition of the Baltimore *Evening Sun*, he filled six columns of the editorial page with a mass of tiny dots, each representing a federal jobholder. Nowadays he could have filled the whole paper, many times over.

Mencken's description in the *Chrestomathy* of how Harry Hopkins and three of his aides thought up the New Deal is priceless:

> Four preposterous nonentities, all of them professional uplifters, returning from a junket at the taxpayer's expense, sit in a smoking car munching peanuts and talking shop. Their sole business in life is spending other people's money. In the past they have always had to put in four-fifths of their time cadging it, but now the New Deal has admitted them to the vast vaults of the public treasury, and just beyond the public treasury, shackled in a gigantic lemon-squeezer worked by steam, groans the taxpayer.

Hopkins had a mere billion dollars to work with—equivalent to $16 billion in today's money. One wonders how Mencken would have summoned up enough scorn to cope with the multi-*trillion*-dollar "stimulus" and "bailout" extravaganzas that fill today's news stories, one after another.

Mencken must have been a hard man to like, though. Reading Terry Teachout's book, I was surprised at the narrowness of Mencken's life. He lived at home with his mother till she died in his 46th year; then he lived on in the same house till he married five years later. He traveled little and was not gregarious, spending almost all his waking hours in a study or office, writing. The only hobbies recorded by Teachout were music and bricklaying. Mencken's wife, whom he loved dearly, died after five years. Mencken never remarried, and had no children.

He was an autodidact, with all the misplaced confidence and all the astonishing gaps that characterize that breed. Not many of us would venture to write a book about democracy without ever having read Tocqueville, nor embark on a translation of Nietzsche with only a sketchy knowledge of German.

What redeems Mencken is the same thing that redeemed Yeats in Auden's great obituary poem: "Time that is intolerant / Of the brave and innocent / . . . Worships language and forgives / Everyone by whom it lives." The man was a writer all through. He kept clarity and wit well tuned across a colossal volume of output, inspiring awe in anyone who writes for a living.

He loved words. In *The American Language* he fairly caresses them. This is one of those books with a fan club, and when you meet a fellow fan, his eyes light up as he tells you his favorite parts, often quoting from memory. For myself, I have always cherished the section that deals with those pidgin dialects developed by immigrants. An American Hungarian who wants to know if the plumber fixed the sink will, according to Mencken, ask: "*Megfixolta a ploma a sinket?*"

In our present straits, though, it is Mencken's loathing and contempt for our political classes that should most appeal. Mencken loved liberty and perceived that any politician more active than Coolidge—which is to say, well-nigh any politician at all—seeks to take liberty away from us, either in pursuit of some mad ideology, or, more often, just from the desire to be seen always busy at something. Public adoration of wonder-worker politicians like FDR excited Mencken's fiercest diatribes. He called FDR "the *Führer*," "the greatest president since Hoover," etc.

There is nothing more American than this cold-eyed distrust of office-holders, and nothing we are more in need of today. Like the reminders of mortality whispered by a slave to the Roman general in his triumph, Mencken's 1931 essay "Imperial Purple" should be ceremonially read aloud to every incoming president when first he sits down in the Oval Office, to impress on him, in rhythms that would not disgrace a poet, the vacuity and mediocrity among which presidential power mainly dwells: "All day long the right hon. lord of us all sits listening solemnly to bores and quacks. . . . It takes four days' hard work to concoct a speech without a sensible word in it. Next day a dam must be opened somewhere. . . . The Presidential automobile runs over a dog. It rains." **NR**

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happy warrior

MARK STEYN

Remember

My personal chronology of the Bush years is simple enough:

For the first eight months, I did schtick. We all did. In April of 2001, he went to Quebec for the Summit of the Americas and was greeted by the then–Canadian prime minister, whose name escapes me, as I trust it does you. “Bienvenue,” he said to Dubya. “That means ‘Welcome.’” Ha-ha. What fun we had. There were the usual riots, of course, led by that French farmer famous for destroying his local McDonald’s on the grounds that “the free market is violence.” He was accompanied by various weekending trustafarians who’d motored up from the Ivy League, plus large numbers of Canadian students who’d had their exams postponed and were given $300,000 of taxpayers’ money in order to enable them to get to Quebec City and smash the place up. I forget what the summit was about, although I had plenty of one-on-one face time with lonely Latin-American foreign ministers who couldn’t find anyone else to talk to, and I may even have filed a couple of widely unread thumbsuckers on the lines of: “The Guatemalan deputy trade minister gets it. Why don’t we?” In the end, the summit wasn’t really “about” anything. Not a lot was in those days.

Then came a Tuesday morning in September. And “Steyn butched up,” as a Canadian columnist recently put it. There was a lot of that about. Even mild-mannered coves like the State Department’s Richard Armitage were getting General Musharraf on the phone and threatening to bomb his country back to the Stone Age. The Taliban fell, and Mullah Omar scuttled out of town, hitching up his skirts and pausing only to put a false beard over his real beard, with no time to pack even the Rod Stewart cassettes subsequently found in the compound of the man who famously banned music throughout the land. (The old “Do Ya Think I’m Sexy?” Rod, not the namby-pamby *Rod Stewart Slays the Great American Songbook* stuff.) When the troops got to Tora Bora, they discovered our enemies really did live in caves—and not the Bond-villain underground lairs the CNN graphics department mocked up, vast inverted Trump Towers burrowing deep into the earth with Osama stroking a Persian as he plotted world domination from the upside-down penthouse in Sub-Basement Level 43; but just regular caves—as in a smelly hole in the ground with a carelessly demarcated communal latrine at the back.

And then, with the Taliban gone and the world’s slowest “rush to war” with Iraq just getting under way, I made the mistake of going to Europe to visit the famous *banlieues* of Paris and other Muslim *quartiers* of the Continent. And at that point I started to get the queasy feeling the bewildered investigator does when he’s standing in the strange indentation at the edge of town and, just as he works out it’s a giant left footprint, glances up to see Godzilla’s right foot totaling his Honda Civic. I began to see that it’s not really about angry young men in caves in the Hindu Kush; it’s not even about angry young men in the fast-growing Muslim populations of the West—although that’s certainly part of the seven-eighths of the iceberg bobbing just below the surface of 9/11. But the bulk of that iceberg is the profound and perhaps fatal weakness of the civilization that built the modern world. We’re witnessing the early stages of what the United Nations Population Division calls a “global upheaval” that’s “without parallel in human history.” Demographically and psychologically, Europeans have chosen to commit societal suicide, and their principal heir and beneficiary will be Islam.

PAUL J. RICHARDS/AFP/GETTY

And once I’d stumbled on that, even the thought of Mullah Omar prancing round the room to Rod Stewart’s “Hot Legs” couldn’t cheer me up.

When I go hither and yon doing my apocalyptic vaudeville, I’m often asked a variant of the following: If what you say is true—that Islam is likely, by default, to take over much of the West in a generation or two—why would it be so dumb as to jump the gun on 9/11? After all, before that Tuesday morning, few of us gave any thought to the subject.

The short answer is that Islam is not monolithic, and that it’s perfectly understandable for Osama bin Laden to play bad cop to the radical Muslim lobby group’s good cop, granted that they share the same aim: the wish to annex the crusader lands to the House of Islam.

The longer answer is that, even if 9/11 was a strictly unnecessary provocation, it was still a useful revelation of the limits of the Great Satan’s resolve. Or to look at it another way: A couple of years back, over in The Corner at NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE, some of the more bloodthirsty lads were demanding to know why Bush didn’t do this and why Bush didn’t do that. I forget what it was now—knock off Assad, freeze Saudi bank accounts, whatever. John Podhoretz responded that we were missing the point, which was this: Bush was as good as it was going to get.

The electors have made a bet that we can return to that happy capering playground at the Summit of the Americas where all the great questions have been settled and indulgent governments can subsidize their own anarchists. If 9/11 ultimately revealed America’s self-imposed constraints, November 4 is already understood as a comprehensive repudiation even of that qualified resolve. Like I said: For America’s enemies, that’s useful to know. **NR**

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— *David W. Brady, Douglas Rivers, and Laurel Harbridge*

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— *John Rosenthal*

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